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Methuen's
Library of Humour
Edited by E. V. Knox

**ANTHONY
ARMSTRONG**

(‘A. A.’)



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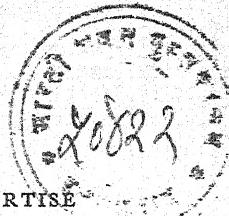
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I. HOW TO ADVERTISE

AS Shakespeare (or was it Bernard Shaw?) once said, 'Sweet are the uses of advertisement', and he was quite right. Advertisement in these days is not merely art. It is far more. It is an art which really brings in money.

To some of us advertisement comes at all times quite naturally; but for those who, although diffident, may be thinking of going into commerce and trying to foist their wares on an unenthusiastic public, I have written these few hints.

The following are the principal methods of advertisement at present practised in this country :

A. THE OLD, OR STRAIGHTFORWARD, METHOD

This consists in writing up on every hoarding, quite modestly, some simple catch-phrase, such as: 'Beer is Good, but Bloggs's is Best!' The idea is that when the conversation flags in drawing-rooms and places where they talk, the hostess will give utterance to the first

thing that comes into her head will say, because she has seen it written up everywhere, 'Oh, by the way, beer is good!' Whereupon the grateful guests, who know the answer to that one, will at once chorus, 'But Bloggs's is Best', and then will fall to talking once more of Shakespeare and the musical beer glasses. And when they next want a beer, they will remember that Bloggs's had cropped up in conversation at Lady Barr-Parler's and will order it.

Owing, however, to the introduction of American ideals into English business, the Straightforward Method is rapidly becoming obsolete.

B. THE 'TERRORIZATION' METHOD

This is most effective and very easy. Take any medical dictionary and look up several foul diseases. Abstract the most revolting symptoms, and in a couple of picturesque paragraphs suggest to the reader, client or victim, that he possesses some or all of them. Man's sympathetic nature being what it is, he will at once probably discover that he *has* got them; but for stubborn cases you should advise him in a further paragraph to make little tests, such as touching his toes rapidly

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three times in the early morning and then seeing whether he has green spots, electric eels, or black forked-lightning in front of his eyes. This will certainly get any one, after which you point out how Curall soap, by removing superfluous epidermis, renovating cuticle, and spring-cleaning the pores, is the only thing to arrest facial decay. He then staggers to a shop, buys your soap, and saves his life, which he devotes to writing letters to you about it from '*Mon Repos*' or '*The Laurels*', with photos of himself before and after using. These you publish as a further advertisement, but great care must be exercised in so doing. Photographic reproduction in advertisement columns being what it is, it is quite possible that the reader, assuming he detects any difference at all, will be led to suppose that the last state of the man was worse than the first.

This brings me to the next method:

C. THE 'UNSOLICITED TESTIMONIAL' METHOD

In no other branch of advertising has there been such an advance.

In the old days, I presume, some enthusiastic young thing once wrote to a firm and said she 'adored' their wonderful new scent—*Polefeline*.

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Bouquet'. Whereupon the surprised and grateful firm sent her a free bottle and published her letter by way of public support to their own claim.

Things have moved a bit since then. The procedure for you to adopt nowadays is this: Select any film actress, divorce court addict, or other popular character, whose name and opinions you think will be a draw to the public, and send her a polite request for any appreciative remarks on your scent and a large cheque to cover her postage expenses, adding that, in the unlikely event of her not having heard of your product, you will send her a trial bottle. She will send you back a receipt for your cheque from her advertisement manager, a letter to say you needn't bother about the formality of actually sending the scent, and three photographs of herself enclosed in a signed typewritten statement to the effect that 'Miss Zoe Trope has always used (blank space to be filled in with the name of your product), that she can't get on without _____, and that she attributes to _____ her undoubted success on the stage, her personal charm, and her well-known beauty.'

Thus every one is pleased all round.

The next method I will discuss is :

D. THE HISTORICAL METHOD

Begin like this:

'In olden days Phoenician keels ploughed
the blue waters of the Channel bringing to
the rude, untutored Briton the products
of the highest civilization then known to
man.'

You must next insert a picture, specially done by your artist, of a Roman galley with what looks like an Arab standing in the prow and staring with shaded eyes at a far-distant beach, nearly ten feet away, on to which the galley is charging with all sail set. On the beach are several apparent Vikings gesticulating and staring back at the far-distant galley, every one in the drawing being evidently a little short-sighted. You see now, by the way, why it is called the historical method; you have got quite a lot of history into that picture. The beauty of this method is that it doesn't really matter what you are advertising. If it is something that the Ancient Britons used to possess, such as flint knives and woad, you can continue under your picture: 'How much better than their primitive flints and woards are the wares of this age! Indeed in modern marts Kavanagh's Kapital Kitchen Knives or Newmans Blue Distemper (or, if you like, Madame

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Nue & Cie's evening gowns) stand to-day unrivalled, etc. . . .

If, on the other hand, it is something that the Ancient Briton hadn't got, you can still say, 'How much less woad need they have worn if only they had possessed Gurgle's "Gas Stoves.' In fact, you can even advertise grand pianos this way; it is quite feasible. All this is called bringing the romance into business.

Yet another method is the following:

E. THE BEAUTIFUL METHOD

It is obvious that, while a commercial article which is beautiful in itself can be advertised quite simply, the greatest elegance of style must be enlisted on behalf of an unbeautiful article. A plain advertisement beginning, 'Do you wish every one to notice you when you come into the room?' should only be for an entrancing scent, a delicate complexion cream, or, plainly, in a man's case, a pair of beautiful new brown shoes; whereas a column that begins on a note of 'Fair-skinned beauties of Northern climes, dusky-haired, chestnut-eyed Southern damsels, slender-waisted, languishing maids of the passionate East, all the world-loveliness that through the ages has maddened warriors

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and inspired poets . . . ' may end up in an advertisement for Liver Pills, Anti-Chilblain Ointment, or Whitlow-Remover.

Remember this, but do be careful not to get the two styles muddled up. Obviously you should not ask customers whether they want people to notice them when they come into the room by saying, 'How well your whitlow-remover is working to-day, dear!'

The next method of advertising is:

F. THE LADIES' METHOD

Goods for sale to the sweeter sex must be very carefully handled in advertising, for it is certain that those points which attract a man will not attract a woman and vice versa. Similarity to others of one's sex in evening dress is an example of this.

So, whereas in advertising, say, a new brand of cigarettes, it is enough to say to your male readers that they are cool-smoking, do not burn the tongue, and are rolled in pure rice-paper, for your feminine clients you must write as follows:

'These daintily-monogrammed cigarettes are tipped in either gold, parma-violet, old rose, soft rose or hard rose, to match your boudoir. In their soft-scented languorous clouds they

any other line of bracing is only too apt to fail. You will notice also the little runners to allow of perfectly free lateral movement to the specially treated suspender cord.

MR. A.: Why, they seem to me the very braces I have been looking for for years. They must be expensive.

SALESMAN: That is not our way, sir. This 'Safe-hold' Brace is but five-and-six. And there is a free Accident Policy in every box.

MR. A.: Marvellous. I will take two gross. There is both comfort and security in the 'Safe-hold' way.

I. THE 'SECRET OF MANUFACTURE' METHOD

For certain classes of goods this method will be found most effective. It should aim at describing the factory processes of your article, combining, however, a strong strain of romance with the technical detail. You may take the following as an example:

'Gleam of sunrays on the low, moist alluvial slopes of Japan, busy yellow fingers handling the shining mulberry leaves, golden yellow cocoons of sheerest spun sunshine—all have gone, madam, to make those "Bombyx" silk stockings you prize so highly.'

'From the cocoons the threads are whipped

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up, the filaments combined, and the strands croissured. The utmost care is taken to avoid slubs before the throwing of the strands. Therefore buy "Bombyx".

"Your "Bombyx" silk handkerchief, sir, on the other hand, recalling to your mind the soft-coloured draperies of Eastern maids—that too has undergone a thousand processes to make it what it is. It is the most skilful combination of tram and organzine on the market, and when dyed in the hank it is absolutely free from gum, leaving only the pure fibroin ($C_{15} H_{22} N_5 O_6$).

"Therefore, look for the name "Bombyx".

II. BILLIARDS À LA FRANÇAISE

WE were walking along the Grand Boulevards the other night when we saw written up: 'Grand Billiard Match at 9.0 p.m.' Percival stopped instantly. He has rather fancied himself as a billiard-fan—ever since his 'rooting' one evening for Inman caused such a sensation in police-court circles. Next we read 'Entrance free.' Now 'free' sounds to Percival like a trumpet-call to a war-horse. We plunged forward, while I tried to point out that there must be a catch in it somewhere; for I cannot believe there is really such a word as 'free' for the Englishman in Paris. I showed him that '*Consommation Obligatoire*' was written underneath. But Percival simply whizzed into the doorway all the quicker. Now I come to think of it to be told it is obligatory to have a drink is hardly a deterrent to a fellow like Percival. I followed him in.

'We can do this all on the cheap, old man,' panted Percival, as we dashed up miles of stairway. 'A small bock for a franc, and all the rest of the show for nothing, old man.'

At a doorway on the second floor, an official abruptly sold us two tickets at five francs each.

BILLIARDS À LA FRANÇAISE

We said, wasn't it free. He replied that it was and that the tickets were for the '*consommations obligatoires*'.

'Never mind, old man,' said Percival with a poor show of reluctance. 'If we've got to have five bocks, we'll have them.'

Then we entered a room, full of mysterious shadows, religious stillness, and people saying 'Sh-h' at us. I thought at first we must be in a private cathedral, and as we took our places in the semi-darkness the impression deepened. In the centre of the nave was a small billiard table in a pool of light. In the centre of the billiard table were three billiard balls, all extremely close together. Sitting casually half on and half off the table was an enormously fat man. He was gently poking at the balls with a small cue held almost vertically. Each time he gave a poke the balls trembled slightly together. The shadows and the silence enfolded us.

Soon we discovered other worshippers round about; and Percival noticed rather a beautiful window in the South Transept with 'Bar' written up over it. Then some one called out a number, and instinctively Percival began to fumble along the ledge of the pew in front for a hymn-book. He found instead a glass of beer. Instinctively, also, it was half-way to

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his lips, when without a word a hand appeared out of the darkness at his side and took it from him. The silence deepened. The fat man was still poking gently at the balls, but had slightly changed the position of his left hand.

After a while a waiter, or a churchwarden, or somebody, tiptoed past, and Percival—very irreverently, I thought—ordered two bocks. It seemed all very wrong somehow. The churchwarden brought our bocks, but took both our tickets away. The bocks, he explained in an English whisper—very ‘garlickized’ English—were five francs each for the first order; but of course we could order again for only one franc if we wished. I had known there would be a catch somewhere, but Percival was quite indignant and said he was going to complain to the management or the bishop or whoever was responsible. Then the religious peace descended once more, broken only by Percival in trouble with his froth.

Suddenly Falstaff—the fat man—swore, an umpire appeared in the limelight, decided that two balls were touching, and separated them to different spots. A wave of excitement swept the pews at this. Bets were apparently being made. We got quite worked up too, and Percival bet me that Falstaff would get an in-off-the-red. I bet he wouldn’t—and won. I

BILLIARDS À LA FRANÇAISE

just managed to get the money off Percival before he realized that the table—a French one—had no pockets whatever, the game being entirely for cannons. I ordered two more bocks on the strength of it, and got them at one franc this time, thus bringing the price of our drinks down to three francs each.

After a while Falstaff failed, and his opponent came to the table. During Falstaff's innings he'd apparently been hobnobbing with the lads at the bar and a boy had to be sent out for him. He was thin and saturnine and we named him Mephistocles. Certainly he could use the black arts. I have never seen billiard balls achieve more impossible cannons and yet gather cheerily round for the next. Percival got so enthusiastic that he applauded by rapping with his glass—and the waiter brought us two more bocks.

Falstaff reappeared in due course and Mephistocles with an air of relief went back to his drink and to tell the lads another one he'd just thought of. Breathing heavily, Falstaff made 68 cannons in succession; and we had two more bocks, thus getting them down to two francs each. We felt we were doing the management in the eye. Percival was trying to work out on a bit of paper how many we would have to drink to get them at a

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reasonable figure, and I began to get quite keen on it too. I ordered a couple more, and Percival got some writing paper from the waiter to calculate it all out on.

An hour later, Mephistocles was in play with 397 to Falstaff's 349, and we had got our bocks, by sheer hard work, down to one and a half francs. Mephistocles' play now seemed more wonderful than ever. Percival said he'd never seen any one make a cannon off two red balls at the same time.

By midnight bocks were being quoted at about one and a third francs, and Percival, under the impression that a game of snooker pool was in progress, was trying to join in; so I took him home.

We decided next morning at a late hour that billiards à la française is too exhausting a game to watch very often.

III. LE SQUARE

IN our role of Insulars Abroad Percival and I feel that we have at any rate done the graceful thing. The *entente cordiale* has been strengthened and the 'Hands Across the Channel' movement has received some much-needed encouragement. Frances, however, says that as usual we have simply made fools of ourselves again; but then you know what women are. They have no finer perception of the things that really count.

It happened while the three of us were travelling from Calais *en route* to Paris. Percival was deep in an exciting detective novel which we had insisted on his taking—to prevent him mistakenly discussing French politics in French with English fellow-travellers—when our train stopped at Abbéville Station. On that particular portion of Abbéville Station which came opposite our particular portion of train I saw a notice board. I at once roused Percival from his book and pointed it out to him. It read:

SQUARE

AT THE DISPOSITION OF

MM. LES VOYAGEURS

Behind the board was a small white paling enclosing an exiguous patch of grass which had obviously passed an unhappy and thwarted childhood. At either end was placed a dejected bench. There was also what looked very like a gravel path. The whole thing was about the size of a suburban front garden, and the idea of it obviously was that those electing to descend during the halt might have a pleasanter place for a short stroll than the station platform.

Seen through a warm compartment on a February afternoon, it looked particularly uninviting; but it was the underlying intention which attracted both me and Percival. We saw its significance and we thought of the zealous and conscientious stationmaster racking his brains to achieve some little civility for his temporary guests. We thought of his sudden flash of inspiration as he conceived the idea of something really English, '*Un square pour la promenade*'. We thought of his pride in an adjunct so much more aesthetic than a *salle d'attente*, so much more spiritual than a *buffet*. And then we thought, with a lump in the throat, of the poor man's growing disappointment and chagrin as train after train from England, the home of the Square, came in, paused unheeding, and went its way.

LE SQUARE

Percival and I looked at each other and simultaneously rose from our seats. We at least would bring a ray of light into the poor man's life. We were *MM. les Voyageurs*. *Le Square* was at our disposition during the (ten) minutes or so of *arrêt*. We would use it for him.

Followed by protests from Frances we descended. Together, stern-faced, heads high, a nonchalant word upon our lips, we entered *Le Square*.

I don't think any one had ever entered *Le Square* before in all its history, for the sensation we caused was terrific. A row of heads at once appeared on the side of the train like peas in a pod. Porters clutched each other and stared incredulously. A ticket collector dropped his collected tickets and shouted joyfully for the stationmaster. I even saw a retired British colonel in a first-class smoker momentarily glance up from the *Morning Post*.

Percival and I, affecting not to notice, strolled once round *Le Square*, stepped twice across it, and then sat down on the northern bench, and started a conversation about Leicester Square, Trafalgar Square, and other Squares we had known.

Soon the stationmaster came up at an

incredulous double, followed by a posse of porters.

'*Bonjour, messieurs*,' he began, when he had found his breath and his voice.

'*Bonjour*,' we replied graciously and moved round to the southern bench, whence, I think, one procured a better vista.

'*Qu'est-ce-que vous faites là, messieurs?*'

'*Nous nous amusons dans votre beau Square*,' I said gravely, and added: '*Quel beau panorama!*' with all the rapture of one who for the first time surveys the Côte d'Azur from the Grande Corniche.

A few of the French onlookers raised a cheer at this, and the stationmaster acknowledged it with simple courtesy by turning round and taking his hat off.

'*Vous vous trouvez bien là?*' he then inquired anxiously, as though about to ask us to sign the Visitors' Book.

We said we found both ourselves and each other very nicely, thank you, and ventured that it was surprising to us that *Le Square* was not more crowded, seeing what a magnificent idea it was to have one there, by example.

The stationmaster was too delighted with this for anything. He beamed all over yesterday's shave. Then suddenly his eyes grew

moist. We were now confirmed in our supposition that the conception and laying out of *Le Square* had been a venture of his hot youth, an expression of Abbévillian pride in himself and his station, which, alas, had been slowly withered by the neglect of successive train-loads of unimaginative English, till this day when Percival and I had restored his faith in his earlier ideals.

'Ah, messieurs!' he began with feeling, and then in a flood of almost unintelligible French his emotion found vent. He entered by the gate to shake hands with us. He drove back with ignominy a sacrilegious porter who had dared to follow. He picked up a match which Percival, careless lad, had dropped on the grass. He asked us to come to the buffet and have one with him. At least that's what Percival thought he said. My own impression was he wanted us to go to his office and see the special top-dressing he had used for the grass.

Percival said he was sorry but he had a train to catch. The stationmaster appeared to wave this aside. It was nothing. What was one train between friends! He had hundreds at his station every day and could pick Percival a good one whenever he liked. In fact, I think he offered to stand Percival any train he cared

to mention. If, however, Percival insisted on having this one, well, no doubt one could arrange it. He jerked a word over his shoulder to the guard.

The guard, however, a native of a terminus like Paris, had evidently no use for civic pride as displayed by a stationmaster of Abbéville, a town of only ten minutes' halt. He blew his whistle.

I had been anticipating this and ran. Percival, to whom the stationmaster had now taken a terrific fancy, had to stop and shake hands and could not get away so quickly.

I just caught our carriage and clambered in. Percival did not. I told Frances that Percival was busy shaking hands at Abbéville and would probably come on later by a special train. Frances, who prides herself on her presence of mind, threw out his book on to the platform to while away the time for him, and we sat in thoughtful gloom till Amiens was reached.

At Amiens, Percival reappeared, explaining rather diffidently that he had managed to get in at the very end of the train, but on his passage back to our compartment had had to pass through the restaurant car and had been delayed.

LE SQUARE

Between Amiens and Paris he spent the time
wondering what had become of his book.
Frances, in cowardly fashion, helped him look
for it.

IV. WE USE THE NEW CUT

THE New Cut is a straight canal over two miles long. The idea of it is to enable yachts to sail from the Yare into the Waveney or vice versa, without having to go right down to the mouth of one, practically out into the sea, and back again up the other. Well, Percival and I used the New Cut during our trip. For a long time afterwards we were a bit flustered and dishevelled. We used nearly all of it.

We began by being in the Waveney. We were, after our gale experiences, tied up to what an inhabitant assured us was a practically immovable village on the river bank. We were waiting for the tide to turn, because the wind was already against us, and Percival, who had been looking things up in the book, had discovered that the New Cut was almost impassable against both wind *and* tide, being too narrow to allow even ordinary tacking, let alone the big stitches *we* usually take. Why there should be any tide at all in a canal I couldn't understand, but Percival said the book said there was. Percival yachts a good deal by book.

At two p.m., after four hours' waiting, Percival suddenly said the book said the tide had turned and so we left our moorings. A man in another yacht—quite a novice—asked us in surprised fashion, as we passed, if we were going up the New Cut. Percival cried: 'Why, yes, old man!' and waved a friendly tiller at him. At which we promptly ran him down. Since he was a novice, he apologized, and Percival told him severely he really must both belay and avast on occasions like that. Then we sailed superciliously into the mouth of the New Cut, and were immediately swept out again by a strong and hostile tide.

When this had happened three times, I asked Percival if he was quite certain about the tide having turned at two p.m. I felt he might have got the wrong time, or the wrong river, or even the wrong book. Percival told me he was not a fool, and read it out again. He was quite right: the tide *had* turned at two p.m. But for some unearthly reason the poor fish Percival had seen fit to assume that originally it had been *against* us; whereas during all the hours we had so patiently waited it had really been going our way. And now of course it wasn't.

I was very nice to him about it, even though I still didn't see why there should be any tide

one way or the other. I merely said it was a pity the author of the book hadn't made his meaning quite clear for *all* types of reader.

So we had another attempt. This time, knowing what the tide was doing, we managed actually to sail, though very close to the wind and rather too close to the bank. We got on famously. We made a yard a minute. The canal looked very long and straight. To pass the time I worked out that if we were lucky enough to maintain our present rate we should do the New Cut by two-fifteen a.m. on the third morning—speaking roughly, of course.

Then we came to a bridge. It took five men half an hour and three ropes to get us through, after which our rate slowed down a little. So we decided to try and tack. At first we made quite four yards every tack, but unfortunately we made them in the wrong direction, and when finally we ran into both banks practically at once we gave it up. There was only one thing left—to tow; for the humorist who originally built the New Cut provided a tow-path alongside it as a guide to the joke.

Captain Percival got out and towed first, while Crew Apple handled the tiller. We kept the sails up to get what help we could from the wind. Encouraged by Crew Apple with huntin', fishin', and shootin' cries, Captain

Percival towed very well for half an hour. Then we stopped because of a post and notice on the bank about trespassing. We didn't stop in order to read it; we stopped because we got the tow-rope twisted round it.

Our next halt was for a bush. Crew Apple having incautiously steered too near the bank, the bush—a fine healthy one—was uprooted by the boom and came on board into the well all over Crew Apple. Apple, who was not used to steering in forests, promptly ran bang into the side. This stopped both the yacht and Percival practically simultaneously. The subsequent conversation between Percival, who had sat down very abruptly ashore, and Apple, peering coyly through the leaves on board, was not marred by any insincere politeness. The net result was that Percival accused Apple of leaving all the towing to him and suggested that he should get out and do some for a change.

Crew Apple crawled out of his primeval jungle fastnesses, like some *Eoanthropus* or *Filtdown Sub-man*, and Percival, after a scathing remark about house-boats and window-boxes took his place in the thicket, whence he was heard later asking in a muffled and querulous voice which branch Crew Apple had been steering with.

Apple towed manfully with the rope tied round him. Apple passed people on the bank and the people on the bank passed remarks at Apple. Apple met a cow; the cow met Apple. The cow met the rope, got both entangled and frightened, and towed the *Merry Widow* and Apple and all for half a mile before it disengaged—luckily in the right direction. Even the angry Percival (whose vision of the bank was still obscured by thick foliage about him) was constrained to commend Crew Apple for some remarkably fast towing.

The end of the New Cut came in sight, and then a funny thing happened. Perhaps it was due to some slight change in the wind, but the *Merry Widow* slowly began to sail instead of being towed. Since the tow-rope, though now hanging slack, had yet to be pulled through the canal-side rushes, Crew Apple did not notice any vast change, while Captain Percival still could not see for leaves except dead ahead.

So gradually, all unsuspected by Captain and crew, the *Merry Widow* began to overtake the toiling Apple, the tow-rope dragging in a vast swathing loop between them. They went like this for some while—a pretty sight.

Then another notice about trespassing cropped up and took the loop of the tow-rope.

WE USE THE NEW CUT

For some while Apple and the *Merry Widow* strained immovable on either side. Then the yacht, having the wind while Apple had only Apple, began to win. Slowly at first, but with increasing speed, the bewildered Crew Apple was pulled backwards as the *Merry Widow* under the freshening wind went forward. At the end Apple, doing about twelve miles an hour backwards, rounded the post like a flash, and did twelve miles an hour forwards. Finally he was pulled into the water. Percival, immersed in arboretum, did not notice.

The *Merry Widow* reached the end of the New Cut a quarter of an hour later, when Percival discovered his crew's absence and hauled him in from astern.

What still rankles in the crew's mind is that his captain had the impudence to accuse Apple again of leaving all the towing to him.

V. MUZZLE THE MONKEY

THOUGH the keeping of livestock in barracks is, as a general rule, forbidden by King's Regulations, actually there are some animals that are allowed and some that are not. Without laying itself open to the charge of being too pernickety the Army Council has, no doubt wisely, decided that small monkeys are not.

So our Private Rifle was definitely in the wrong when he returned to Havershot from week-end leave with a small monkey, which he told his friend Private Pullthrough he had bought from a brother in the Navy, after mendaciously explaining to the Corporal of the Guard that it had followed him home because he had a nice kind face.

The monkey spent Sunday night in the barrack-room tied to a bed, and during Monday was successfully concealed from the Orderly Officer and prowling sergeants by a great-coat which very nearly removed it by suffocation from the list of effectives.

Monday evening was a red-letter evening in the regimental canteen's history. In fact, there was such a crowd round the bar that every

man had to hold his glass in his hand and dared not leave it on the counter for a moment. In the centre of it was Private Rifle, by then well stricken in beers, and the monkey, whom Rifle had attempted to name Jacko, but whom public opinion had christened 'Muzzle', due to a strong resemblance which every one in the canteen had noticed, except Private Muzzle. The monkey, shy at the beginning of the evening, had now gathered beerage way, and had been prevailed upon to do a few tricks with a military flavour, such as dying for the Sergeant-Major, presenting arms, saluting Lance-Corporal Pouch, and loving Private Muzzle, which last brought the house down and sent Private Muzzle off to bed, remarking that some — considered themselves — funny, didn't they?

In the midst of the excitement, the Orderly Corporal appeared, to close the canteen. It was Corporal Foresight, a stickler for discipline; and so the monkey was hurriedly buttoned into Private Rifle's tunic.

•Now, neither you nor I would like to be buttoned into Private Rifle's tunic; nor did the monkey. What he actually did is not quite clear, but Private Rifle suddenly leapt into the air, uttering eldritch screams of uncontrollable mirth, and jumped out of the window. He

arrived later in his barrack-room, saying that he had lost the monkey and that he had always been ticklish from a boy.

Where Muzzle the monkey spent Monday night is not known. That he was not bored, however, was proved by the appearance next morning of 'D' Company office cat, which, looking as though it had had three rounds with a tornado and its tail tonsured, crept into the office and sank into an exhausted slumber. At intervals throughout the morning it woke up with a nervous start and immediately jumped three feet vertically in the air, trying at the same time to face all ways at once. The monkey himself was not seen till dinner-time, when he made friends with Private Butt, who very generously shared Private Barrel's dinner with him. Thereafter Private Barrel, who saw the thing in a different light, tried to recapture him, employing the lure of a pot of jam, borrowed from the cook-house, to bring him within reach. Both the monkey and the jam, however, went considerably quicker than Barrel had counted on, and Barrel spent the afternoon explaining to a sceptical audience that he hadn't eaten it himself. It is only fair to the monkey to point out that he did return the empty pot; for Sergeant Haversack found most of it in his bed that night—

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just before getting out again and bandaging his foot.

Muzzle the monkey's next appearance was in the Officers' Mess at about midnight. He entered by a window unobserved and crept along the rafters of the roof till he was directly over a select poker party. At this point he tripped over an electric light wire and fell suddenly and unexpectedly on to the exact centre of the card table, where he gibbered angrily at the players for a second, before disappearing like a flash up the chimney.

It is very regrettable to have to add that not one of the five players saw fit to comment on the circumstance, nor did they show, beyond an uneasy start, that they had noticed anything out of the ordinary. Shortly afterwards, however, they all got up and went to bed with very thoughtful faces, even leaving their glasses unemptied.

It was not until next morning that the hue and cry became general, when Lieutenant Holster, while inspecting the new guard prior to mounting it, saw one of the men looking uncomfortable and finally observed that a small monkey had just appeared on top of his steel helmet, having arrived thither by the back stairs. Now Holster was an easy-going officer, but the rules about correct dress on

guard-mounting parades are very stringent. And though, too, on certain occasions men are allowed to wear official emblems in the cap, the nature and scope of these emblems is rigidly laid down. So Holster told the man off for wearing a monkey on guard-mounting. He then brushed the animal off his own cap, whither it tactlessly leapt during his rebuke, and reported to the Adjutant that an unauthorized monkey was occupying the roof of the guard-room.

The Adjutant, writing letters at his office desk, at once ordered the R.S.M. to have the monkey recaptured and find out who was responsible for bringing it into the barracks. Then he resumed his correspondence. Our Adjutant is pretty good at this sort of thing.

I don't know where the R.S.M. got his ideas on monkey-catching, but he ordered out all the defaulters and armed them with a rope, an empty sack, and a half-peeled banana apiece. These last, by the way, were requisitioned from the canteen grocery-bar and eventually led to a correspondence four months in length and three inches in depth between seven different people as to who should pay.

Muzzle the monkey evaded capture easily during the morning. He only came down from the roof twice, on each occasion when an

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incautious pursuer had put down his banana for a moment in order to tie a slip-knot in his rope. In the afternoon when people began to climb up on to the roof he threw stones and moved to another roof. When they threw slip-nooses he caught hold of the ends till some one started to pull and then he let go. This always got him a laugh, till the R.S.M. forcibly com-mandeered for his capture party any one who commented audibly on the methods used.

By four p.m. the monkey was still at liberty. He had covered most of the barracks just ahead of a large crowd of pursuers and seemed to be enjoying it. Private Rifle was already under open arrest. He had misjudged the R.S.M.'s intelligence slightly, by remarking in his hearing once too often and far too innocently, 'Wonder 'oo the little beggar belongs to?'

At six p.m. nearly the whole battalion was enlisted in the hunt, due to ill-advised laughter in front of the R.S.M. They were consistently just failing to catch the monkey.

At six-fifteen Miss Sergeant-Major Magazine, aged eleven, came past, held out her hand and said, 'Chup-chup-chup!' And Muzzle the monkey came and perched on her shoulder.

VI. PIGEONS

A SHORT while ago Division decided that they would have Minor Operations. Minor Operations, as distinct from Major Operations and Manœuvres, generally mean more paper from Division and Brigade and more work for us. In this case, however, it meant more fun too; for, for some inscrutable reason, our battalion had had attached to it for the week a Brigade Signalling Officer complete with a Mobile Carrier Pigeon Loft.

That pigeon loft was an object of great curiosity to us. We wanted to go over it and investigate it thoroughly; for we always *were* fond of animals and birds and so on in our Mess. But owing to the operations we never seemed to get a chance. Also there were about seventy other people displaying a curiosity in the pigeons too, from the Brigade-Major who wrote every day to know if they were still all there, to the battalion cooks who tried to steal them for pies every night. In fact, the only person who didn't seem to care about them was the gentleman *in loco parentis*, the Brigade Signalling Officer. But then, he, poor fish, had just got

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engaged, and every one knows what that means: telephone messages in feminine voices all day, a preoccupied look when at work, total absence from four p.m. to midnight, and his sleeping-quarters littered with crumpled white ties—‘some of our failures’, in the words of the Beau’s valet.

Well, *venons à nos pigeons!* For a week, — while the operations were on, we could not investigate the loft and only saw the pigeons on duty. On Saturday our battle ended; on Monday the loft was to return; therefore Sunday morning we went down *en bloc* to see the pigeons unofficially for the first time. The Signalling Officer, weak boob, had gone away for the day with a fatuous smile and new lavender spats. So Captain Bayonet, whose aunt has an aged and foul-mouthed parrot, and therefore affects to know everything about all birds, appointed himself leader.

The first person we saw (after, of course, the sentry placed day and night over the loft with instructions to shoot any approaching cook on sight) was a signaller, armed with a long pole with which he was beating round the top of the loft, sending the pigeons out for their morning exercise. We were rather impressed by this; it looked like a combination of getting apples from high boughs, lacrosse,

and tossing the caber. Our Lieutenant Sword-frog, who is young and enthusiastic, was permitted to have a try, and at the first drive brought down several ripe pigeons who hadn't properly woken up yet. One large, fat, sleepy fellow came down on to Captain Bayonet's hat and had to be picked off by hand. This gave us an idea. We decided we would ourselves test these pigeons at their job by taking a few over to the Mess and sending messages back to the loft.

A moment later Bayonet and I and Lieutenant Holster were on the Mess tennis-court, each holding a somnolent pigeon. James and Swordfrog awaited us at the loft.

The signaller had told us that the way to send off a carrier pigeon was to hurl it along just above the ground; so Bayonet led off.

He unfortunately had the sleepiest pigeon. It hit the ground almost at once, bounced twice, and rolled to a standstill in a clump of grass at the edge of the lawn, where it tucked its head under its wing and dropped off to sleep once more. Bayonet got it out of the rough into the fairway with his second, and managed to launch it with his third. Flapping languidly, it just cleared the bushes at the far end of the aerodrome and winged heavily off.

Then we remembered that in the excitement

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of getting the bird away we had forgotten to send any message. I may say here that James and Swordfrog subsequently spent several minutes searching this pigeon all over for any remarks. James eventually decided it must have eaten them, while Swordfrog was of the opinion it had pigeonholed them for future reference.

I tried my pigeon next. Unluckily I forgot about the tennis-net. I disentangled it and claimed a second service, as my first had not got over. This time I managed to put a leg-break on it, and it went off at a sharp angle. This surprised it. It rose vertically like a helicopter, circled the Mess twice in startled fashion, and finally sat on a chimney-pot, where it began to preen itself. A well-directed pebble recalled it to the path of duty, and it went on its way carrying to James the message (in imitation of the Brigade-Major's daily query), 'Please report by carrier pigeon how many carrier pigeons you have.'

It was some time later, while Holster's pigeon, a stout, well-favoured bird, was being retrieved from the Mess kitchen, where it was discovered being heavily fed by the waiters, that a private appeared bearing in his hand a pigeon with a message round its leg. He saluted and presented the bird to Bayonet. It was James's answer:

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

'Yours received. Total Strength of Carrier
Pigeons, 36. Made up as under:

'Pigeons Seated in Loft	22
'Pigeons on Duty	1
'Pigeons on Leave	1
'Pigeons Absent without Leave	3
'Pigeons Flying Round me and Dashed Difficult to Count—presumably .	12

'Reply is being sent by carrier pigeon, as
requested, but orderly accompanies, as am
informed these are only one-way pigeons.'

We stopped after that. We felt that if we
had been reduced to sending pigeons about
by hand we might as well telephone and have
done with it.

The Mobile Pigeon Loft returned to Brigade
the following day. The three pigeons absent
without leave turned up a short while after and
looked rather startled—and quite rightly. After
all, it does rather strike at the basic idea of
carrier pigeon work, if their home is a mobile
one.

VII. PACKDRILL THE PARROT

I DON'T know what the something is about our Private Muzzle which attracts the lower forms of life, but there it is. I told you in another volume about his mongoose, and now, only last week, there is this parrot.

Private Muzzle, when questioned by any one in authority, swears that a sailor brother of his brought it home from Shanghai and thrust it into his hand at Waterloo, just as he was returning to barracks from furlough. That is as it may be; we are none of us sufficiently versed to know if they have parrots in Shanghai, and we only have Private Muzzle's word for it that he had a sailor brother at Waterloo—which sounds unlikely. Besides, Private Rifle had some while ago offered much the same excuse for bringing a monkey into barracks. The one thing that we do find really easy to believe is that some one *gave away* the parrot to Muzzle, and gave it away, moreover, at a moment when it was too late to return it; for I should imagine that parrot is the most evil-minded, scurrilously abusive and foul-tempered bird one could find between Shanghai and the East India Dock Road.

Travelling in a kit-bag did not improve its looks or its feelings; in fact, as a parrot it was very nearly spoilt for good. It lay low next morning in Muzzle's barrack-room till after morning parade, when it revived and held a convalescent reception of all Muzzle's friends. Most of them, I regret to say, spent more time and patience over improving its mind than a conscientious Education Officer does over a party of biscuit-brained Third-Class-Certificate men. The parrot, on the other hand, displayed an aptitude for acquiring knowledge only commensurate with that of a First-Class-Certificate candidate thirsting for promotion. Unfortunately its main tendency was towards the acquisition of novel verbal forms rather than more usual information. It also passed a few remarks of its own with a rousing nautical flavour that brought down the barrack-room. By dinner time it had been christened 'Pack-drill' from a habit of murmuring bad language to itself in an undertone without moving its beak.

That afternoon Private Muzzle, helped by Private Trigger, who is of an ingenious turn of mind, constructed a thoroughly military perch for Packdrill the parrot. It consisted of a rifle slung from Muzzle's shelf by two equipment braces with a canteen lashed to the piling

PACKDRILL THE PARROT

swivel to hold drinking water, and a steel helmet above, as head cover. The parrot itself was tethered by the leg with the cord of a pull-through and was fed at intervals with army rations on the point of a bayonet. There could be no doubt about the military flavour of its new home.

During the course of the evening, Packdrill paid his first visit to the canteen, where his comments were highly appreciated. He supped royally on beer, a large portion of Welsh rabbit, and a small portion of Private O'Jector's right ear. Private O'Jector, during a spirited remonstrance, taught him some new words, and Packdrill was carried triumphantly to bed.

Now, Packdrill soon proved that he had a very sound memory, particularly for well-embazoned phrase. In a couple of days he had acquired many of the somewhat mottled remarks current in the barrack-room, and was being instructed in military commands. Displaying himself an apt pupil, he soon passed with honours in squad and platoon drill, and began to be made the recipient of scandalous confidences about the senior N.C.O.s and officers by some half-dozen imaginative privates, who hoped it would go farther.

It did. For at this stage, considering himself, I presume, fully equipped for military

life on a wider scale, Packdrill the parrot broke loose.

Most of the troops were delighted at this turn of events. It seemed to them full of possibilities. Private Muzzle, however, instantly assumed the innocent expression of the man who doesn't know what a parrot is, but thinks his aunt once told him it was a kind of an Eastern bird, and went about hoping Packdrill would not be noticed.

This, of course, was a vain hope. A gaudy green parrot at large in a barracks does not pass unnoticed ; and when that parrot proves to be both foul-mouthed and distressingly personal about higher authority's foibles and appearance it positively excites comment.

Lieutenant Swordfrog noticed him first when drilling his platoon. He had just given the command to 'Trail Arms!' when Packdrill materialized from a tree and alighted on Private Muzzle's rifle, having by then not unnaturally got the impression that all rifles were intended for perches. Swordfrog blinked incredulously and questioned Sergeant Haversack in a rapid undertone. Sergeant Haversack stolidly agreed that he saw something too, and volunteered that it might be a green pheasant. Or, again, he added after a moment's tactful thought, it might not. The

discipline, however, of the platoon was perfect; and no one appeared to notice anything unusual, Private Muzzle in particular being completely unable to see the bird at all. The command 'Slope Arms!' caused Packdrill to flutter slightly, but he retained his balance throughout this and three subsequent exercises. With some ingenuity Lieutenant Swordfrog at last dislodged him by the order 'Fix Bayonets!' whereupon Packdrill, pausing but to mention to the world, quite veraciously, that Swordfrog only needed to shave once a week, departed towards the orderly room, cursing fluently.

The Adjutant, hard at work on a new scheme to relieve unemployment amongst subaltern officers, heard a flutter by the window, but took no notice. A moment later he happened to look up at the ceiling for inspiration.

He got it all right. Swinging on the electric light pendant was Packdrill, who in the affable tones of one initiating a round game said, "'Oo fell orf' is 'orse on parade?" The Adjutant, who keeps his head if not his seat under the most trying circumstances, merely rang the bell for an orderly. When the orderly, Private Rifle, entered, the Adjutant in the calmest possible manner and without looking up said, 'Take away that green parrot sitting on the electric light, and if possible find out to whom it belongs!'

Altogether an admirable exhibition of coolness. Unfortunately Packdrill had apparently anticipated something of the sort and had left by the window a second before Private Rifle entered.

Private Rifle gulped, went up to the light and inspected it closely, then saluted and backed with a scared face out of the presence; to be heard later suggesting to the other orderlies various theories that had occurred to him, none of them complimentary, to account for the Adjutant's obvious indisposition.

Packdrill's next appearance was in the cook-house, where he gave Private Barrel a fit by exclaiming in his ear in perfect imitation of the Colonel's tone and manner, 'Fourteen days' C.B.' It took two friends ten minutes to convince Barrel, whose conscience was not as spotless as it might have been, that he was not confined to barracks after all, and that he need not report in the next Defaulters' Parade.

Thereafter Packdrill, finding military remarks so effective, turned the regimental guard out three times in five minutes, dismissed a fatigue party which had just fallen in ; and in the temporary absence of Lance-Corporal Pouch gave 'About turn!' to a small body of men on the high road, with the result that discipline, and a somewhat bovine lack of

initiative, took them back to the next barracks whence they had just come.

It was our second in command who finally cleared up the situation, luckily before Packdrill came to the Colonel's ears. No major likes to be called 'a bandy-legged son of a sea-cook' by an unauthorized parrot in front of privates; more particularly when that parrot passes the remark in the voice of one of the battalion's habitual defaulters. Major Saddle-flap, a man of action, turned and hurled his cane at the offending green streak, and with remarkable luck caught Packdrill somewhere about the back axle.

It was too much for the bird. With an indignant squawk and a flow of perfectly leprous abuse he winged indignantly into the blue.

I hear to-day that the First Blankshires near by, with whom we have never been on the best of terms, have caught him and are appointing him regimental pet. They have just sent over to say that his intimate conversation about our officers is so stimulating.

VIII. OUR RAT'S RETURN

I HAVE told you elsewhere about 'Our Rat Week'. Well, just lately, we have again had trouble with a rat in the barracks; but, as on the previous occasion, we tackled it with our customary efficiency. The following correspondence, rescued from the H.Q. office files, will show the affair in full:

Extract of Report from Orderly Officer to Adjutant:
'The food in the battalion bread and meat store shows signs of being gnawed, as if by rats. This may in all probability be attributed to the fact that rats have entered the store and have been gnawing the food. It is presumed that they get in underneath the walls. I suggest that the edges of the floor inside be thoroughly concreted all round.'

NEXT DAY. *Adjutant to 'A' Company:* 'Reference above, please arrange to have all methods of ingress or egress, likely to be used by rats, dealt with by the means suggested.'

THREE DAYS LATER. *'A' Company to Adjutant:* 'All holes round edge of floor and walls stopped by 11.42 a.m. this morning. Quartermaster wants to know who will pay for concrete.'

OUR RAT'S RETURN

SAME AFTERNOON. *Orderly Officer to Adjutant:* 'The food in the bread and meat store still shows signs of being tampered with by rats.'

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'See above. Your method apparently not very effective.'

'A' Company to Adjutant: 'My method considered perfectly effective. Suggest that a rat must have slipped in through door while storeman's back was turned, tampered with food, and then slipped out again.'

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'Arrange to have additional wire door put on outside. Issue strict orders to storeman, regarding proper use of a double-door system.'

TWO DAYS LATER. *Private Rifle (storeman):*
_____ these _____ doors!'

THREE DAYS LATER. *'A' Company to Adjutant:* 'Orderly officer reports direct to me that a tin of bully-beef in the store was entered during the night, obviously by a rat. Have cemented floor and walls up to height of two feet, but suggest the rat gets in through window by climbing up water-spout. Perhaps the best method of keeping the rat out would be to line all walls completely with corrugated iron and have a window made in the roof instead. Quartermaster still wishes to know to whom to charge expense of wire door and concrete.'

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'Carry on with your suggestion.'

THREE DAYS LATER. *'A' Company to Adjutant:* 'Store considered rat-proof.'

NEXT DAY. *Orderly Officer to Adjutant:* 'Private Rifle, storeman, reports he actually saw a rat eating an army biscuit inside the store. He would have killed it, but was so surprised to see anything apparently enjoying an army biscuit that the rat got away.'

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'How the hell does this rat get in?'

NEXT DAY. *'A' Company to Adjutant:* 'Heaven knows. Have now covered the roof as well as walls with corrugated iron and supplied storeman with candles in lieu of window.'

NEXT MORNING. *Orderly Officer to Adjutant:* 'Storeman requests issue of more candles. His supply was eaten by a rat which presumably entered the store during the night.'

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'Try putting down poisoned meat.'

FOUR DAYS LATER. *'A' Company to Adjutant:* 'Poisoned meat untouched. Men complaining of queer taste in their dinner. I intend to obtain a cat. Quartermaster urgently inquiring re price of concrete, door, and candles.'

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'Report when you

OUR RAT'S RETURN

consider you have made store rat-proof, and all further developments.'

FOUR DAYS LATER. '*A*' Company to Adjutant: 'During night 11-12th, a rat apparently forced an entrance into store and ate half a pound of margarine and all the cat's supper. Cat showing a decided disinclination to remain in the store.'

Urgent Message from Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'Why don't you butter rat's paws?'

Urgent Reply from 'A' Company: 'Ah, but first you've got to catch your rat.'

Second Urgent Message from Adjutant: 'Reference my first message—(a) For *rat* read *cat*; (b) Don't be such a funny ass; (c) Suggest a trap to catch *cat* with.'

Second Urgent Reply from 'A' Company: 'Cat is perfectly easy to catch without a trap.'

Third Urgent Message from Adjutant: 'Reference my second message—(a) For *cat* read *rat*. (b) Attention is again directed to para. (b) of above-quoted letter.'

THREE DAYS LATER. '*A*' Company to Adjutant: 'Rat-traps have been extensively used. Total bag to date: The storeman's finger (twice); the orderly officer's foot (once) the cat (twice—once each end). Another tin of bully reported broken into during the night, though the stove was under lock and key and

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watched by sentry. Am prepared to swear no rat can have got in. What do now?"

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'Am submitting report to Brigade.'

NEXT DAY. *'A' Company to Adjutant:* 'Urgent. Perhaps report to Brigade unnecessary, as mystery now solved. Storeman reports he killed large rat this morning, asleep on meat ration. Rat has apparently been *inside* the store all the time, and, owing to preventive measures taken, could not get out. Quartermaster asks, urgent and pressing, to whom to charge concrete, door, traps, poison, candles, corrugated iron, and cat.'

Adjutant to 'A' Company: 'Tell quartermaster to charge to Garrison Amusements Committee.'

IX. ECONOMY DEBATE

SINCE national economy is the watchword of the day, we at Ypres Barracks, Havershot, don't mind what sacrifices we make. Of course, it is iniquitous that our *pay* has been reduced. Sacrifices, yes, by all means, but our pay is quite a different matter. We want every penny of our pay, whereas every one knows that a sacrifice is giving up something you don't really want. However, as Captain Bayonet points out, there is a bright side. If we receive less pay, we have to pay less income-tax.

Meanwhile we are concentrating on effecting what economies we can in the Mess. We had an Extremely Extraordinary General Mess Meeting the other day—and the dust of warfare has hardly settled yet. The chief battle raged round the various papers, periodicals, and reference-books which are regularly taken in by the Mess. We all felt that we could save considerably by reducing their number, but which to discard caused a terrific amount of hot argument.

The first skirmish was over Bradshaw—hardly popular reading but very useful to chuck at our Lieutenant James when he tries

to sing at the piano on guest-nights. The Mess Secretary moved that we did without Bradshaw in future on the grounds that (*a*) no one could ever understand it, (*b*) if any one did he must be so brainy as to be not quite right in the head and so ought to have gone into the Sappers; and (*c*) most people had cars anyway. Lieutenant James strongly supported the motion, adding somewhat irrelevantly that people who knew something about music *liked* his singing. It was opposed by Lieutenant Swordfrog, whose car is in dock for its annual overhaul, owing to an error of judgment in traffic, and who argued that a Bradshaw was a very necessary adjunct to any Mess.

Captain Bayonet suggested a compromise to suit all parties: let the Mess not take in any more Bradshaws, but keep the old one in the Mess—if necessary, rebinding it with stiff cardboard after each guest-night. Swordfrog at once complained that with an out-of-date Bradshaw a fellow would never be able to rely on catching his train. The Mess Secretary countered by pointing out that this also applied to any one, unless of exceptional intelligence, looking up trains even in an up-to-date Bradshaw: whether one were relying on catching a wrongly looked-up train in a right Bradshaw, or a rightly looked-up train in a wrong

Bradshaw, the net result would be the same. The Colonel, who was sitting in a distant corner, here suddenly told us to get on with it, adding personally he found Bradshaw most useful, whereupon the motion was immediately put to the vote. The result was: For discarding Bradshaw—16. Against—2. Of these one was the Colonel, and so the Bradshaw was kept.

The question of which daily papers should be deleted opened up the controversy even more widely. Major Saddleflap, well fortified by sherry, said in an impassioned defence of the *Morning Post*, that he always had read the *Morning Post*, that his father, grandfather, nay, great-grandfather, always had read the *Morning Post*, and that, please Heaven, he would continue to read the *Morning Post* as long as he drew breath. (Pause for applause and sherry.) He certainly would never lend himself to the support of any motion which was outwardly framed to save a few paltry pennies for a Mess already rolling in undisclosed assets, but which inwardly was part of a base and underhand intrigue to hound from the ante-room tables one of the oldest and staidest dailies that ever army majors had read nothing else than. (Long and continued sherry—interrupted by cries of 'Grammar! Grammar!') Sooner than

that he would resign his commission; he would . . . The motion was here hastily withdrawn, not so much because we minded whether Saddleflap resigned his commission or not, but because it was the only way to stop him talking.

After this we had of course to agree to retain the copy of the *Daily Herald*—if only as a counter-irritant.

The question of the *Times* next came up for debate, and the Colonel at once asked why was it necessary for the Mess to take in *two* copies. No one quite liked to tell him the answer to this. It is, that he himself invariably reads the *Times* at his breakfast, which means that junior and so earlier members are unable to read it at theirs for fear of re-folding it wrongly and thus dislocating the C.O.'s whole morning; while as regards subsequent reading, well, if you have ever seen a once good-looking *Times* after a colonel has 'glanced through it' at breakfast . . . Lieutenant Holster skilfully saved the situation by explaining that two *Times* were essential because the articles therein were so helpful to earnest hard-working officers studying for Promotion Exams.

The voting to exclude the *Daily Express* was 9 to 9, the opposition being those who read the *Daily Mail*. The subsequent voting to exclude

the *Daily Mail* was the same. The Mess Secretary hereupon made the cynical suggestion that they should be taken on alternate days, leaving the previous day's issue to hold the fort against the new-comer, and that as it was sensation rather than news that was demanded, he doubted whether any one would notice. He was shouted down angrily by some sixteen members speaking at once, and party feeling began to run so high that the Colonel had to apply a guillotine. Both papers were thus retained.

The *Daily Mirror* was kept because it was the best paper to prop against a coffee-pot; while the suggestion to exclude the *Daily Sketch* was defeated by those who like to know the latest from the Jiggs household—18 votes to nil.

Turning to periodicals, all, with one exception, were voted to be retained. The general feeling—though unvoiced in the Colonel's presence—was, what was a fellow to do when his day's work was done and there was still an hour to fill in before lunch. The one exception was the *Society Camera*. To this we were just about to deal the *coup de grâce* when Captain and Quartermaster Ledger, by clearing his throat in a complicated fashion, indicated that the Colonel over in his corner was at the moment immersed in the *Society Camera* with

every sign of enjoyment of the Lido bathing pictures. The insubordinate motion was then hastily withdrawn, and the meeting about to be declared closed when Holster discovered on the table a paper we had not discussed.

It was the *Havershot Garrison Parish Magazine*, and with a sign of relief it was unanimously agreed that, cost us what it might, in the hour of the nation's crisis we too would make our sacrifice. A note was there and then sent to the Padre saying that in the interests of economy the Mess had, after long discussion, regretfully come to the decision it could no longer afford to take in the *Parish Magazine*. We then rose, with a sense of duty done, and Swordfrog, who always was a bit soft, was manœuvred into pressing the bell for a round of sherry. . . .

We got a hot little note from the Padre yesterday. After a good deal about duty and setting an example, he went on to say that he failed to see quite what economy we would effect by refusing to accept his helpful little magazine, which had always been in the past, and would continue to be in the future, presented to the Mess free of charge.

X. PERCIVAL'S HAT

THIS business began with the blowing off of Percival's hat in the Place de l'Étoile. There are few more unpleasant spots to have one's hat blow off than the Place de l'Étoile. I once knew a man who was practically a champion at having his hat blown off. He had had his hat blown off just before the arrival of the Life Guards in a Coronation procession, and he had had it blown off from the top of the Eiffel Tower and from the *Berengaria* three days out from New York and into the *rose du Barry* vat of a dye-works; but even he shuddered when I once asked him casually if he had ever had his hat blown off in the Place de l'Étoile. Yet Percival did it quite easily.

He was standing by the Avenue de la Grande Armée when his hat abruptly left him, bowled merrily off south-eastwards into the traffic, and collided with a taxi. The taxi was practically undamaged, but the hat was severely shaken. It lay quite still for some while, till a motor-bus stirred it up and sent it off once more, this time to an encounter with a limousine. The limousine also was but slightly affected.

Percival meanwhile, having made a rapid

calculation of speed and direction, was trying to get round the outer periphery of the Place in order to cut off his hat before it reached the Champs Élysées, *en route* for the Jardins des Tuileries, the Louvre, and possibly the Gare de Lyon. Naturally he did not dare venture straight out after it into the great open spaces. It is hazardous to attempt the traffic of the Place de l'Étoile direct at any time; to do so with one's eyes on a receding hat is simply *felo-de-se*.

After the limousine, the hat appeared to luff up a few points to the wind, and ran strongly on an easterly course at a good rate of knots, till a racing cyclist, with his head down in his front wheel and the rest of him pointing up and back, tried to retrieve it with his foot. Of course he oughtn't really to have attempted it; no doubt racing, not trick cycling, was his forte. Anyway, he seemed to bear no malice after picking himself up. The hat, now apparently inside out and looking rather dissipated, had meanwhile resumed its triumphant course, and after bouncing off another taxi at last reached the central pavement by the Arc de Triomphe.

Here an altruistic Frenchman took as much trouble over trying to catch it as if it had been his own; and I am able to speak with certitude

on this point, because his own blew off in the attempt. He was immediately replaced in his self-imposed duty to his neighbour by an excitable dog and a municipal sweeper with a broom.

Percival by now had reached the entrance to the Champs Élysées. Here he stood breathlessly, like a diminutive goal-keeper in an outside goal, waiting for his headgear and shading his eyes with his hand.

The hat, however, never reached him. With total disregard for the dignity of the law it blew straight at an *agent de police*. The *agent*, with total disregard for the dignity of hats, put a flat and enormous foot upon it with extreme accuracy. He then carried it triumphantly back to where Percival had been but now was not. I thanked him on behalf of Percival, myself, and England, and received it tenderly. It looked like a cross between a *béret* that had had a night out and the thing a *valet de chambre* does polished floors with.

Percival and I having spent ten minutes chasing one another round the Place de l'Étoile, at last established touch; after which we sat in a *café* and applied first-aid to the hat. No less than three waiters, with that peculiar French interest in other people's fortunes, took a hand in this. One brought water and one

scrubbed it and one pinned up the ribbon, and at intervals they held it up on a hand and admired its progress with all the air of a milliner displaying the latest model. It at last began to look a little better, but it still might have been anything. The dog and the *agent* had both impressed their personality on it in very permanent fashion.

At this point a hand smote Percival's shoulder and a friend he picked up the other day, a French student named Émile, exquisitely dressed in the latest London fashion, greeted him.

'Ha, mon vieux! Ça colle?'

'Bung-oh, old man!' returned Percival, nervously hiding his hat under the table. 'Where are you off to?'

'I go across the road to buy me a new hat,' returned Émile in all innocence. 'You come help me, eh?'

After a searching glance Percival said judicially that he didn't see why he shouldn't, and tried to avoid my amused eye.

We rose and with a nonchalant air Percival drew forth and put on his hat. Two of the waiters raised a little murmur of approbation in the background, but Émile did not notice.

We entered the French hatter's shop opposite

and a sort of vicomte came forward and bowed. He started perceptibly at the first sight of Percival's headgear, but otherwise took it bravely. I kept myself in the background near the door behind a large hat-tree in full fruit.

Emile started with both hands and his native tongue to convey an idea of the kind of hat he wanted to buy. The usual sort of scene then ensued, the vicomte bringing out soft hats of every shape and Emile spurning them aside with shrugs of the shoulder. At last the discussion became a trifle acrimonious. They began to interrupt one another's sentences half-way through instead of just before the end. The vicomte produced unexpected hats as if they were epigrams; Emile shrugged them into the limbo of bargain-sale relics. I gathered eventually that Emile the exquisite was demanding a hat in the latest English style; while the vicomte was maintaining that a certain brand of hat under consideration *was* the very latest from London itself.

At this point Emile produced a trump card. He suddenly asked Percival's opinion of the hat offered, and when the vicomte, after a withering glance at Percival, was about to deliver a crushing remark, he said simply,

'Voyez-vous, mon ami est Anglais; il connaît bien les modes de Londres.'

It was overwhelming. I have never seen such a change come over any one as over the vicomte. He closed his mouth and stared incredulously at this representative from the world's leading sartorial city. It was just as though '*Célandine*' (*née* Stuggs), *modiste* of Tooting, had discovered in an argument about a frock with Mrs. Smythe of The Laburnums that a real *Parisienne* was present.

Reverently the vicomte bowed. His assistants gathered round at a respectful distance. Percival's battered tile was now regarded with something akin to awe. And when under Émile's urgent appeals Percival confessed he didn't much like the hat in question, there was obviously no more to be said. Authority had spoken. The vicomte put it back in the box and showed us all out with a crushed air. His hats had ceased to be in the correct English style; his entire stock had suddenly become *démodé*, at the brief criticism of Percival wearing an abomination which bore traces of every vehicle and person in the Place de l'Étoile. It was a wonderful example of the power of British sartorial prestige.

All things considered, therefore, it was, I think, a great pity that five minutes later,

PERCIVAL'S HAT

having shaken off Émile, Percival should have returned brazenly to the vicomte, bought the disparaged French hat, and discarded his own London one in the shop itself with every sign of relief and disdain.

XI. RURITANIA IN URBE

AS a finale to our week of seeing London through foreign eyes, by pretending to be Italians one day, French the next, and so on—in no case confessing to any knowledge of English—we decided to do it as the Ruritanian men of letters. We could not speak a letter of Ruritanian, but it did not worry us. The great point was that nobody else could either; and so, on the principle which enables one to talk impressively on Modern French Art when in a gathering of English stockbrokers and equally impressively on Weak Bulls in the London Oil Market when in a gathering of Modern French artists, Percival and I spoke Ruritanian with ease. It had a suspicious resemblance to those tags of ancient Greek which the gradual leakage of a Classical Education from the youthful brain leaves lying about in odd corners of the memory; but then Ruritanian is like that. At any rate, you may correct me if I'm wrong.

The question of dress gave us a little more trouble. Percival's first effort was to turn up in a brown linen plus-four suit with a white bib collar and black gloves, which sleek me

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considerably. I thought the poor lad had gone quite boobah or something, till I discovered he had merely misunderstood me and thought I said '*Puritan*'.

He then went away with a copy of *The Prisoner of Zenda* in his hand and reappeared later with a floppy hat and a pair of those boots which hang down over the ankles like a half-peeled banana and look as though they ought to be worn with sock-suspenders. He remarked in self-defence that even foreigners of European extraction dressed very queerly, and that it was lucky for us Ruritania was not in Asia or Africa; and the words were scarcely out of his mouth when we looked out of the window and saw two negroes from the Jubwahili hinterland and a Chinaman from Long-Toe-Shoo, all dressed in immaculate Savile Row suitings. That decided us. We put on our own immaculate Tottenham Court Road suitings and sallied forth.

The part of London we had determined that two Ruritanian men of letters ought to see was Hampstead. There are a lot of questions of the day in which two Ruritanian men of letters might interest themselves in Hampstead —such as how long the Bank Holiday paper remains on the Heath despite the attacks of three men with pointed sticks, and how long

Georgian houses remain in Downshire Hill despite the attacks of Sunday bus services. But I regret to say that the two Ruritanian men of letters never got to Hampstead at all. All that actually happened was this:

Rudolph Apple and Percival of Hentzau began by writing out HAMSTED on a bit of paper and showing it to people with an inquiring '*Tond apameibomino?*' in best Ruritanian, meaning of course: 'Would you have the goodness to inform us of the best route to the place named in the margin?'

For half an hour people either laughed, moved away apprehensively, or said they were strangers in those parts. So at last we took it to a policeman.

'*Pose gar ow?*' we asked, putting it more curtly.

He at once took us by the arm and shoved us down the Hampstead, Highgate, City, South London, and Morden Tube.

It was at this point I may say that, artistically, we failed. Had we kept up our Ruritanian pretence we should no doubt, knowing nothing of London, have actually taken a ticket and tried to get to Hampstead on the Hampstead and Highgate Tube (with which, if you will allow me, I will still couple the designations of City and South London, not

forgetting the place called Morden somewhere near the Sunny South Coast).

Being, however, Londoners underneath, we knew the thing was impossible in the time at our disposal; for as a general thing on that particular line the trains which stop at the station you want to get in at (either by unanimous decision of the directors or sheer lack of interest on the part of the driver) omit to visit the place you want to go to; whereas the trains which visit the place you want to go to (again either by the unanimous decision of the directors or by sheer forgetfulness on the part of the driver) omit to stop at the station you want to get in at—which makes it dangerous if not impossible to board them. I trust I have made myself clear.

So no sooner had our policeman turned away than we crept out once more in search of a taxi. Unfortunately he turned back again. No doubt he had thought we looked suspicious. He stood over us and said:

‘What’s your little game?’

‘Brekkekex?’ remarked Percival politely.

‘Eh?’

‘Koax! Koax!’ I explained.

‘Próssephee glaukópis Robertos,’ finished Percival, to make it quite clear.

‘Ah, furriners!’ spake grey-eyed Robert.

'Well, where do you want to go to?' he continued, in the tones of one who isn't going to believe when he does hear.

'Empshtead!' answered Percival in broken English with a strong Ruritanian accent, hurriedly writing it out again on a fresh bit of paper, an unexpected down draught from an Edgware through train having removed the first.

'Empshtead!' he repeated, and gave it to the policeman. This time from the way he was standing the policeman read

HAMSTEAD

He was, however, quite equal to it. He nodded sagely, and said 'Ar!' and called up a taxi. Then: 'What nationality?' he asked.

'Ruritanian!' I said in English, to see what would happen. Percival merely repeated 'Empshtead' with a stronger accent on the first. He seemed rather pleased with it.

The constable at once put our two remarks together with considerable skill.

'Rooritanian Embassy!' he said to the taxi-driver.

'Laan ano öthesky poti lophon,' said Percival, climbing in in order to hide his laughter.

'Ortar epeita pedonde kulindeto laas aneides,' I added swiftly.

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'Not at all, Oscar,' replied the constable with true politeness, and moved off in a dignified manner.

'Where is this blinkin' Embassy?' asked the driver after a minute.

'Oh, go to the Savoy Hotel!' I said, giving the game up. It was not the same thing as Hampstead quite, but I felt we needed a drink. Or, as the Ruritanians say, a '*Krateer*'!

XII. THE SQUEAK

THREE is a Squeak in my car. I noticed it first in Maida Vale, which is not the most likely place for noticing squeaks, but still I did. I noticed it at once and said to Percival, who was with me: 'What a row that car in front is making!'

Percival agreed and said it sounded like a sort of a squeak. He added profoundly—to show me, I suppose, that very little was hidden from him in the way of mechanical knowledge—that there was nothing like a drop of oil for any sort of a squeak.

After this the other car drove on ahead but left the Squeak behind. We then attributed it variously to a Number 16 bus, a child's scooter, and the left knee-joint of a very old man on the pavement, till at last it dawned on us that it was emanating from our own car.

'Better stop and trace it, old man!' urged Percival airily. 'It's getting on my nerves. A drop of oil will settle it.'

We stopped the engine and the Squeak stopped. We went on; so did the Squeak. We were not much further forward.

THE SQUEAK

'Well, that proves it's in the engine,' said Percival helpfully and we sat and listened to the Squeak for some while further with rapt Sunday-concert expressions. It was a noise something between an elementary school child doing a proportion sum with a poor quality slate pencil and an asthmatic Chow dog, winding up for a sneeze. After ten minutes we could hear no other noise at all, and were automatically raising our voices. This is a peculiarity of unauthorized car noises, once you start to listen for them. To our tautened ear-drums there was soon but one single noise in the whole world, and Percival even got to the stage of suggesting, as a Klaxon horn sounded from a car behind us, that it seemed to have changed its note slightly.

Something had to be done about it. We took our car to a quiet street, and I drove it about slowly while Percival hung over the side with the bonnet up and listened. Then I lurched a bit, and he put his hand on a sparking plug to steady himself. It didn't seem to steady him much; in fact, he was very restless for a long while afterwards. After this we changed over—at Percival's request—and he drove, while I leant over the side. I was almost certain I had located it when Percival drove too close to a lamp-post, and I lost it and my

hat and my temper all together. We stopped and rested.

'Well, it's in the engine,' repeated Percival eventually. 'That's all we can say.'

'Or the back axle,' I put in. 'It seems to come from behind.'

'It does,' agreed Percival bitterly, 'but it does that whichever way you face. We want skilled help.'

So we took the car and the Squeak to a garage, where we told a lovely oily man—the Skilled Help—all about it.

'We only want to trace it,' said Percival, as the man placed a casual hand on the cushions of the driving-seat and became less oily. 'Once we've done that a drop of oil will finish it.'

'Ar,' said the Skilled Help.

'It must be in the engine,' continued Percival.

'Ar,' said the Skilled Help.

'Because you can only hear it when the engine is running,' finished Percival.

'Ar,' said the Skilled Help again, and just placed a foot on the running board; whereupon the Squeak instantly broke out once more.

'That it?' queried the Skilled Help.

Percival and I were too overcome at the treachery of our Squeak to answer. All our work gone for nothing.

'Sounds like your ellipticals,' continued the

THE SQUEAK

man intimately; 'or maybe a dry shackle.' At least I think that's what he said, but I never was good at anatomy.

He got underneath with an oil-can and poured some on his face and some more on Percival's new brogues. Then he reappeared and placing a heavy foot on the running-board rocked the car to and fro till it wallowed like a three-decker in a heavy swell. The Squeak rose triumphant above the rattling of tools and cans and bottles in the back.

The Skilled Help appeared slightly piqued at this.

'Must be your universal,' he said, and having taken out some floor-boards inside the car, got at the noise from above with a spanner. He put in five minutes of this and apparently frightened the Squeak out of its hiding-place and away forward under the bonnet.

Here he tried to fix it for a further quarter of an hour. He had some little success. His action changed the note of the Squeak slightly, and it dropped an octave or so. Personally, I think it was ageing under its harsh treatment and its voice was breaking. Anyway it did not now lack for company, because a new sound, like a corncrake with hay fever, had developed near the off wing.

I looked and listened with interest. Percival,

after offering to borrow a stethoscope, and then having to explain at length that he was merely being funny, became bored and began to whistle between his teeth. The man, now thoroughly on his mettle, plunged all over the car with every tool he could find. The result was the addition of a surging sound when the engine was started up and a monotonous rattle like a badly fitting skeleton from the region of the tappets.

This made the man quite angry; nor was his fury allayed at all by his suddenly discovering that one of the noises he was under the impression he was chasing was merely Percival whistling between his teeth.

When a subdued humming, like an elderly bumble-bee incarcerated in a match-box of fine acoustic properties, broke out near the fan-belt the man gave up. He weakly said he had no more time, and added that he thought we shouldn't hear any more of the noise now.

Percival paid him for skilled help and got in the car. Then he got out, wiped down his trouser-legs as well as possible, replaced the floor-boards, and got in again.

We drove off. The man was quite right. We couldn't hear the noise any more. As in Kipling's 'Ship that Found Herself' there was one new big voice, compounded of voices from

THE SQUEAK

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XIII. THAT THERE 'AM

OUR barracks—Ypres Barracks, Havershot—has not quite recovered from it all yet. It is still hotly debated in messes and places where they argue. And everybody is frightfully worried. The colonel, of course, still thinks that. . . . But I had better tell you all about it.

It was begun by the World's Youngest Subaltern, Second-Lieutenant Swordfrog, who is now in our midst, having recently passed out of the Royal Military Cradle. He was supernumerary orderly officer one morning, and, as such, his first duty was to inspect the men's breakfasts. He had never done it before; and Lieutenant Holster, who, as the real orderly officer, should have been with him to show him what to do, had confined his assistance to remarking casually the night before that it seemed a pity that two people should get up at 6.45 a.m. when one would do, and that there never *were* really any complaints to deal with at breakfast, anyway.

Second-Lieutenant Swordfrog therefore found himself grappling with it alone in the chilly dawn of the men's mess-room, and was quite

taken aback when, having shouted out (using two octaves): 'Any complaints?' some one stood up and said: 'Yes, sir!'

It was, strangely enough, not even our Private Barrel. Our Private Barrel has a good trick which he occasionally produces on these occasions. He comes in early, gets his plate, takes three or four large mouthfuls, arranges the remainder to look as if it were still untouched, and then complains that 'this 'ere ain't 'ardly enough, sir, for a big man'. He knows well that the inspecting officer has not yet had his own breakfast, and that therefore an unconscious hunger nearly always helps towards approval of the complaint and gets him an extra whack from a grumbling cook's mate.

On this occasion, however, it was the World's Rawest Recruit who was standing up, before Private Barrel could disengage his stomach from under the table edge. Straight from a good home, he said: 'Sir, this is a beastly breakfast, and I cannot eat it. This ham is much too fat.'

Our Second-Lieutenant Swordfrog looked at it. It was very fat. It was, in his eyes, perfectly beastly. The orderly corporal ventured that it was an ordinary ham bought by the messng officer from the Navy, Army, and Air

Force Institute, but Swordfrog was also from a good home and deep called to deep. Exercising the initiative of a junior officer, which at 7 a.m. is a pretty powerful affair, he ordered the ham to be collected and consigned to the swill-tub as being not fit to eat.

The sergeant-cook, having been hurriedly sent for by the orderly corporal, arrived in time to see it go into the tub, and when he had, firstly recovered speech, and secondly, remembered that he was about to speak to an officer, he asked what he was to do about the men's breakfast. Swordfrog airily told him to give them something else, and went back to the mess, happy in the consciousness of duty well done. The sergeant-cook retired to the cook-house to send an SOS for the quartermaster, wipe his forehead, and murmur: 'What a nuisance!' or, as the Army Act gracefully puts it, 'words to that effect'.

Captain and Quartermaster Ledger was the next person to be drawn into the affair. He arrived straight from his quarters, trying as always to give the impression he had been up and at work for several hours and was almost thinking of knocking off for lunch. When he recovered his breath, which he had lost both from the journey and at sight of the sacrilege, he ordered 'bully' to be served, and had a

consultation with the sergeant-cook. The result was a motion carried unanimously that 'this house considers there will be a plurry row when the colonel is told about this 'ere 'am being thrown away uncondemned, and we'd better have some of it as evidence.'

Necessary action was therefore taken through the usual channels, as under: Captain and Quartermaster Ledger told the sergeant-cook to procure a piece of the ham and send it over to the colonel's office table to await the orderly room inquiry. The sergeant-cook then told the orderly corporal to get a piece of ham (in duplicate) for the colonel's table in the office. The orderly corporal detailed Private Butt to pick two or three pieces out of the swill-tub, and send them over to be put on the colonel's table.

Now Private Butt was a good soldier—that is to say, he was not gifted with any imagination, and he obeyed orders implicitly. He collected three pieces of ham, dusted them over, put them on a clean plate, and departed to where he knew the colonel was to be found. Arrived at the officers' mess, he told the mess waiter briefly that: 'Quartermaster's orders! This 'ere 'am's to be put on the colonel's table, and there ain't 'arf going to be a —— row!' The mess waiter obeyed the first part and agreed heartily with the last part.

The colonel, coming in late to breakfast, ate his fish, discovered on his table the ham, now garnished by the conscientious mess waiter with two pickled onions and a sprig of parsley, and demolished it with pleasure, being heard to say that it was quite a change to get a good fat bit of ham instead of that stringy lean stuff.

He then went down to the office, where Captain and Quartermaster Ledger, after an agitated half-hour spent trying to trace his former 'evidence', had at length produced two more pieces, and began to explain to him, not very hopefully, what a rotten breakfast the troops had had and how the ham really ought to be condemned. The colonel lighted his pipe and inspected the ham. Full of good breakfast, he now naturally didn't like the look of it. He agreed, under Captain Ledger's skilful guidance, that it was rotten, had the N.A.A.F.I. manager and the messing officer sent for, and started a good row. The messing officer said that the ham was good and fit to eat, and was backed up in this by a stray officer of the R.A.S.C. The R.A.S.C.'s conception, by the way, of when is meat bad meat is founded apparently on a belief that as long as any part is good it's all good, coupled with a total lack of any sense of smell. The colonel thereupon

retorted that no ham need be bad at all, and in fact he had that very morning had a plateful of as excellent ham as any one could want. The meeting broke up in disorder and adjourned for further inquiry.

And there the matter rests. Every one, as I said, is frightfully worried about it. The messing officer knows now that he has an overwhelming weapon in his hands to convince the colonel that the ham *was* good, but he sees no safe way of using it—short of resigning his commission, emigrating to Australia, and writing to him about it from there. The Quartermaster is worried as to who is to pay for (a) the condemned ham and/or (b) the 'bully'. The sergeant-cook is greatly worried by the comments of the troops at all subsequent meals. The colonel is worried because he can't find out where his excellent plate of ham came from and thus let the messing officer know what good ham should be like. Private Butt is very worried indeed and creeps about looking behind him and saluting every officer twice, while Second-Lieutenant Swordfrog is thinking of transferring. The only person who isn't worried at all is the contractor who buys the swill-tub refuse at a very cheap rate to feed his pigs.

XIV. MILITARY LAND

LIVING in the midst of a desolate Government-owned moor, as we do in Ypres Barracks, has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is that generals very rarely come and inspect you, because it usually takes them about a year to discover

- (a) That you are there;
- (b) That you belong to them and not to some other and rival general;
- (c) That there really are roads (passable for limousines) leading to your moorland fastnesses; and
- (d) That the inhabitants of this outlandish place do not still wear chain-mail and carry crossbows.

The chief *disadvantage* is that you are more or less responsible for the War Department land which surrounds you in every direction. This means that you have to chase poachers off it in the autumn, drain it in the winter, manœuvre over it in the spring, put out the resulting fires throughout the summer, and correspond with the command Lands officer

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about every acre of it all the year round. In fact, you and your troops become something like a communal estate agent.

W.D. land takes Lands officers different ways. Some only worry about practice trenches and manœuvre areas, some about rules and regulations concerning land in all its forms, while some—who have joined the Officers' Shooting Syndicate—only worry about young pheasants. Our command, I may say, has one of the second kind, a fellow who is continually unearthing vague land laws of which no one has ever heard, and trying to make us play with them too.

The other day he found quite a new one about Right of Way. Apparently there is some tradition to the effect that if a landowner wishes to prevent the public from establishing a legal right of way for ever along footpaths across his domains, he must close these paths for one day in every year. I don't know if this is true or not; but evidently the Lands officer (as the representative of a landowning War Office) chose to think it was.

Late one afternoon, therefore, when the Adjutant was dealing happily by himself with returns, the R.S.M. sailed into the office.

'Just got this here telegram, sir, from the Lands officer. Urgent.'

The adjutant took it:

'REF COMMAND ORDER 875 OF 1912 AS AMENDED BY COMMAND ORDERS 216 OF 1917 AND 24 OF 1919 AND MAP ISSUED THEREWITH ACK ACK ACK PATHS ACROSS W.D. LAND SHOWN ON MAP SHOULD BE BLOCKED BY ROPE BARRIERS AND SENTRY FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO ALL CIVILIANS NOT IN POSSESSION OF PASS ACK ACK ACK BLOCKS SHOULD BE MADE AT POINTS A TO K ON MAP ACK ACK ACK IMPERATIVE CARRY OUT THIS BETWEEN DATES TWENTIETH TO TWENTYFIFTH INSTANT ACK ACK ACK ACKNOWLEDGE ACK ACK ACK.'

Needless to say, the date and time of the telegram were 2.30 p.m. of the 24th, but one gets used to this sort of thing in the Army.

The Adjutant read it all carefully, recoiled, and came up bravely to it again.

'Have you ack-ack-ack-nnowledged this?' he asked at last.

'Yessir. Funny they should start this game here! Ain't seen it done since I've been in the Service; but Q.M.S. Fourbytwo says he saw it done in 1905 in Ireland.'

The R.S.M. was aggrieved and quite rightly.

Time immemorial in the Army is that time in which the memory of the R.S.M. runneth not to the contrary, or words to that effect.

'Where's this map they talk about?'

'Just being turned up, sir,' replied the R.S.M. tactfully. Actually, the entire office staff, blaspheming marvellously, were going through all the records and finding every kind of map back to the siege plans of the Ladysmith area. It was eventually discovered hanging face to the wall in the Adjutant's office with a plan of the barrack drainage on its back.

The Adjutant then set to work with the result that at about 6.30 a.m. next morning the orderly officer, Second-Lieutenant Sword-frog, was surveying in the grey dawn a huddled mass of soldiers, rifles, wooden pickets, ropes, tents, cooking dixies, and mongrel dogs, and was murmuring to himself: 'What price glory now!' By 7 a.m. the mass had disappeared and was distributed over the countryside at posts 'A' to 'K' in the proportion of four men, four rifles, two pickets, one rope, one tent, one cooking dixie and mongrel dogs to taste, to each letter.

Then followed a day of wild complaints, every one of which fetched up on the harassed Adjutant. The first, beginning, like Charity, at home, was made at 8.30 a.m. by the Adjutant's

cook to the effect that the milkman wasn't coming that day because he'd been stopped for not having his pass. This was 'B' post's effort, 'B' post being on one of the main line of approaches to the barracks. It subsequently distinguished itself by holding up every single tradesman from the neighbouring village—all of whom had lost their passes during the lapse of years—and finally having a terrific row with the officers' mess fishmonger.

At 9 a.m. 'C' post took a hand by getting part of itself arrested for insubordination to the medical officer, who lived outside and had tried to enter the barracks in plain clothes. This problem also was brought to the Adjutant.

'D' post came next under official notice by being accused of killing a chicken, the property of a civilian in the neighbourhood of their post. This was vigorously denied by Private Pull-through, who said he was only trying to teach it to stand to attention and it died of fright.

'E' post complete arrived in the Adjutant's office during the morning, having found no rest for the sole of its foot. It transpired that, since the map was made, a large brick house had been built over the end of the path 'E' post was supposed to block.

'F', 'G', and 'H' posts, all very close to the barracks, challenged and held up the colonel

every time he passed near them till he was replete with fury, all of which he visited on the Adjutant. Every member of those three posts apparently knew the story of the sentry who was commended and promoted for arresting a general who had forgotten the countersign.

'I' post set its tent on fire while cooking its dinner, and 'J' post did the same, but included half an acre of heather as well. The Adjutant did not miss the excitement in either case.

Finally 'K' post, under the very efficient Lance-Corporal Scabbard, was severely censured by local inhabitants, who arrived in the Adjutant's office in a body, for having protected itself against supposed hostile attacks by digging trenches in a neighbouring field.

By tea-time, therefore, the Adjutant was almost a mental case, and the fact that 'A' post had alone not yet been heard of did not relieve his mind. He felt sure, judging from the others, that it could not have kept out of trouble all day, especially as it was supposed to be blocking a path over the moor used daily as a short-cut by civilians working in the barracks.

So at 5 o'clock he started out to look for 'A' in person.

He found it.

Across a ten-foot wide track, in the middle

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of a desolate part of the moor, was stretched a solitary rope between two pickets. On the rope were three children happily swinging their toes and eating Army rations. Close by was Private Sling, the sentry, obligingly scratching the stomach of a mongrel retriever with the point of his fixed bayonet. A little way away was a tent, outside which was Private Barrel frying sausages, Private Butt advising him how to do it, and Lance-Corporal Pouch playing a mouth-organ and talking of sausages he had fried when a private.

Along the path from the barracks was proceeding a string of returning workers, who, as they reached the rope guarded by Private Sling, made a short detour of some few feet and regained the path farther on.

The Adjutant gave one look and fled. That night he slept with the receiver of his telephone unhooked and his door locked. Next morning he reported to the Lands officer:

'PATHS BLOCKED FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS AS PER YOUR TELEGRAM OF YESTERDAYS' DATE ACK
ACK ACK PRESUME THIS ENGLAND NOW SAFE FOR FURTHER YEAR ACK
ACK ACK.'

XV. OUR TELEPHONE

WE'VE just had a local telephone put in in our barracks to connect up the Adjutant's office with the Quartermaster and all four company commanders. Previously, of course, when the adjutant wanted to give 'A' Company some information, he had the following two ways of doing it:

The first method was for him to ring a bell, tell the clerk who subsequently appeared to take down in shorthand a letter containing the information for 'A' Company, and then send him off to type it out. Returning after lunch, the Adjutant would sign the typed letter and a copy. The letter would then be entered in a register by another clerk, sealed up in an envelope, and finally taken to the orderlies' room. From here, if the orderlies were not too busy eating, shaving, or playing with cats, the things which orderlies always appear to be doing when you want them, the letter would be taken across to 'A' Company late that night or early next morning, so that 'A' Company commander would get it immediately after breakfast—about a quarter to eleven.

The second method was for the Adjutant to

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go to the door of his office and shout the necessary information across to Captain Bayonet in 'A' Company office twenty yards distant.

But now we have a *telephone*. I don't quite know, though, that the Adjutant gains much in speed over the first method. It depends on the orderlies' meals in one case and the company office clerks' cross-word puzzles in the other. Some day we are going to have a stop-watch trial.

The most interesting point, however, about our new telephone is that it is a circular one. Every one is on the one wire, and there is no exchange. The telephone bell, rung by a handle in one office, rings in all the others. It was obvious therefore that a code of rings had to be prepared for the different people on the wire, and this the Adjutant did. He drew up the following list, a copy of which he posted up in his own office and sent out to all concerned:

- ‘ “A” Company—one short ring.
- ‘ “B” Company—two short rings.
- ‘ “C” Company—three short rings.
- ‘ “D” Company—two long rings.
- ‘ Quartermaster—one long ring.’

Everybody was frightfully pleased and started immediately to try and think of something to ring one another up about.

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The Adjutant was the first. He remembered a snappy piece of military gossip he wanted to tell 'D' Company about the Quartermaster. So he seized the handle, and having inadvertently given a short ring before he realized that 'D' was two long rings, hurriedly made it into a long and added another. Then he took up the receiver.

Now Private O'Jector, 'A' Company clerk, had been sitting over the telephone in a state of suppressed excitement ever since it had been installed with the result that as soon as he heard the first short ring, 'A' Company's call, he grabbed the receiver without waiting for any more. In 'B' Company office the clerk, hard at work on a football coupon, heard only the two long rings, but, having as yet had nothing to compare the length of the rings with, thought they might be two short ones, and so took up his 'phone. 'C' Company heard three rings, certainly of varying lengths, but knew that no one else except himself had three rings; and 'D' Company rightly guessed that the call was obviously for him. Captain and Quartermaster Ledger of course took his receiver off too, just to listen, because no quartermaster has yet been made who can resist picking up gratuitous information in a barracks.

'Hullo!' said the Adjutant.

Four eager voices promptly roared 'Hullo!' simultaneously.

Then four angry voices bellowed: 'Get off the line!'

None of them was the Adjutant, who was so overcome at the unexpected outburst he had evoked that he hung up his receiver and tenderly caressed his ear-drum. When the subsequent inconclusive argument between the four heated clerks, as to who had rung the other up, had died down after lasting six minutes and concluding very blasphemously, the Adjutant rather timidly gave two very long and very definite rings.

The voice of 'D' Company clerk suddenly burst upon him with:

'Nah, then; there you go again! I keep telling you that's *my* number you're ringing! If that's you, O'Jector, playing your — games again, I'll come round and — — —
... . . .

'Is that "D" Company?' said the Adjutant in his most refined Sandhurst voice. 'Adjutant speaking.'

There was a heavy silence. Then 'Gawd!' floated down the wire, after which there was another silence. In a short while 'D' Company sergeant-major was heard.

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' . . . and answer the telephone properly next time, m'lad, or I'll be after you. . . Yes, sir. Sergeant-Major Magazine, "D" Company, speaking.'

The Adjutant, very pleased with himself, began his conversation. He was getting well away about the delinquencies of the Quartermaster, when Captain and Quartermaster Ledger's voice broke in upon them without warning and apparently from another world:

'Ere, sir, that's not true what the sergeant-major says. What I mean to say is, that married coal wasn't signed for and Sergeant-Major Magazine knows it. . . .'

'Beg pardon, sir; you know you only told me to . . . '

The Adjutant again hung up his receiver and left them to it. On investigation half an hour later he found the argument still in progress, only now 'B' Company commander, under the advantages of the new system, had been raked in as well to support Sergeant-Major Magazine.

The high-water mark, however, of our telephoning efficiency came later in the afternoon, when the Adjutant, having consistently written letters to the company commanders for the remainder of the day, received a messenger from 'A' Company.

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'Captain Bayonet's compliments, sir, and he would be wishing to ring you up. Would you let him know your number?'

The Adjutant referred to his list and found that, though he had given numbers to every one else, he had left out any reference to himself. He invented a number—three long rings—then rang up 'A' Company to tell them, but could get no reply. Determined to use the telephone or die in the attempt, he went to the office door and shouted loudly for Captain Bayonet.

'What ho!' said Captain Bayonet, appearing a short distance away at his office door.

'Tell your clerk to attend to the 'phone!'

'Right ho, sir. . . . O'Jector, go and answer the 'phone and keep your ears open!'

A little later Private O'Jector's voice sounded in the Adjutant's receiver:

' "A" Company speaking, sorr?'

'Tell Captain Bayonet that my number is three long rings.'

'Very good, sorr.'

A moment later three long rings sounded in the Adjutant's office. A voice said:

'Is that the Adjutant, sorr? Hold on, sorr, a minute. Captain Bayonet would like to speak to you.'

XVI. OUR REGIMENTAL FIREWORK DISPLAY

FRANKLY the Firework Display in our barracks at Havershot was not a success. We hate to have to admit it, but there it is. To the world of course we stand shoulder to shoulder and take the blame as a unit; in the Mess, however, we put it all on Captain Bayonet, who, poor fellow, was so conscious of guilt that it was not even necessary to fine him drinks. You still only have to look reproachfully at him and he offers you a gin straight away.

It was Colonel Howitzer who, towards the end of October, first suggested to the Adjutant that the battalion might get up a Firework Display on the night of November 5th. He added airily that if a bob a head were charged and the show went off well, a lot of money might be made for the Adjutant's pet Benevolent Fund. The Adjutant replied that in that case he would spare himself no trouble to make the thing a success, and promptly sent a chit to Captain Bayonet telling him to take it up, organize it, run it, and report to him when the thing *had* been a success.

For several days Captain Bayonet was very mysterious. He had long conferences with sundry officers and with the R.S.M., with the result that selected troops spent two afternoons practising subtle manœuvres to be done eventually with torches; while Lieutenant Holster was secretly dispatched into the town to purchase several kit-bags full of fireworks. Knowing what our officers' ideas of humour are, these were at once locked up in the store —all, that is, except one over-sized squib which reappeared two nights later in Lieutenant Swordfrog's fire. The squib went out by the door and Swordfrog by the window.

The night of the fifth came. The fireworks were to be let off from the flat roof of the Regimental Offices, a low building on one side of the parade-ground, and five minutes before the billed opening the spectators had lined up on the opposite side in deck-chairs, a great state of excitement, and a north-east wind. They consisted of the Officers' Mess with its wives, daughters, and friends, who were given deck-chairs; the Sergeants' Mess with its wives, daughters, and friends, who had ordinary chairs; and the troops with their wives, daughters, and friends, who had merely forms, barrack-room, 6', soldiers. What with the dark and the north-east wind no one was

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very matey—except, the officers who had wisely taken the precaution of surrounding a decanter or so of port in the Mess beforehand.

Zero hour came. A flourish of trumpets, off, announced the preliminary torchlight evolutions, and the selected storm-troops appeared in four columns at the corners of the square, each man carrying a flaming torch.

The idea, we gathered later, was that these four columns should advance to the centre of the square and there perform intricate manœuvres, the lights from their torches providing a pleasing spectacle to the eye as they wound involvedly in and out of each other's ranks. All very lovely. They had, however, reckoned without the north-easter. As each man rounded the corner into the wind-swept square, the flame of his torch was wiped out with a perfectly-timed precision, that conveyed the effect of some giant sponge wiping figures one by one from a slate. This little contretemps had been entirely unforeseen, but the troops were undismayed. With the traditional discipline of the British Army they tramped stolidly forward and met, as per orders, in the centre.

Now one of the chief points about torchlight evolutions is that the light from your torch shows you where the next man is, so that you are thus enabled to avoid both him and, what

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is more important, his torch. If all the torches are out it makes quite a different thing of it; in fact, unless you are fitted with some sort of sound-ranging apparatus the affair touches the unexpected at every point.

Nothing could be seen in the pitch blackness that filled the square, but plenty could be heard, even above the heavy marking time. The general opinion was that Private Sling's comments were best, but a strong body favoured the pithy remarks on night-rugby, general-post in coal mines, and torchless evolutions in general, believed to emanate from Private Rifle. Some snappy repartee—snappy enough indeed to be attributed next morning in orderly room to Private Barrel under open arrest by Corporal Foresight as first witness—was also much admired. When at last the language was beginning to light up the scene more effectively than torches would have done, the R.S.M.'s voice rose supreme, giving an 'All Columns—*About turn*'. This cleared the square; though unfortunately Column 'A' lost direction and appeared out of the night that covered it with alarming suddenness in the midst of the officers' deck-chairs, starting a panic which was never really quite allayed.

When order had been restored among the

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troops Captain Bayonet was heard from the roof opposite announcing through a megaphone that now that the torchlight manœuvres were over the fireworks would begin. The words were barely out of his mouth before some sort of a rocket went off very abruptly, and apparently just behind him, because we heard his megaphone clatter on the parade-ground ten feet beneath and we heard Private Pull-through's 'Beg pardon, sir. I thought you was ready.' A burst of applause luckily drowned any reply Bayonet himself may have made.

There was then a pause, some subdued murmuring, a 'Ready now', and a terrible fizzing accompanied by a flood of brilliant white light which silhouetted for two seconds Private Pullthrough in panic-stricken flight from right to left across the roof.

Nothing more, however, transpired—beyond the querulous statement by a voice unknown that he'd 'only meant to light me blinkin' pipe, s'welp me!'

A further short pause ensued and then some decorous red things staggered up into the night and were greeted with a respectful 'Aaah!' from the assembled audience. Another rocket next took place; then a second; then three simultaneously, followed immediately by five. At this the audience began to feel a trifle uneasy,

not so much because five rockets had gone off simultaneously, which is fairly normal, but because one of them had gone off horizontally, which is not. And when seven more, this time all horizontal and attended by two highly mobile Catherine-wheels suddenly leapt to life and began to bounce off walls and chimneys, the audience definitely became very restive.

That something had happened which was not according to plan was next instant evident. I don't know much about firework displays myself, but I have an idea that Roman candles don't go off by salvos of dozens at two-second intervals; nor are coloured stars designed to ricochet off walls at six inches range. And I am practically certain that His Majesty's face in two halves lying on their sides and surrounded by a section of trench raid nightmare and a regular cloudburst of golden-rain is hardly a patriotic set-piece. Finally, no good Firework Display, in my opinion, should be over in one and a quarter minutes.

The noise at last died away into silence, except for the crackle of something unintended burning on the roof. There was, however, no applause, most of the audience being too shaken to realize it was over, and the others not having seen it owing to being under their deck-chairs, praying. Then the silence was broken by the

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Fire Alarm on massed bugles, as the band, evidently much relieved that they were at last able to take an important part in the show, came into action on the Adjutant's order.

At this, half of the audience immediately left. The carnage was completed by the arrival into the dark square of the Fire Picquet at the double—whereupon the R.S.M. took charge. Not being able to see, he concentrated on making himself heard, and from various remarks of his which reverberated through the night he was obviously taking it for granted that the half of the audience which had left was the feminine half.

The fire was soon quelled and the picquet dismissed. Evolution, display, fire and all had taken something under twelve minutes, instead of three-quarters of an hour; or, as the quivering voice of Bayonet opposite, evidently speaking from under cover, put it, 'Owing to a slight miscalculation in the time of showing, the Display is now over.'

The Band then played the National Anthem, but His Majesty, having already put in a short and fragmentary appearance, was not again visible.

XVII. URBS IN RURE

I BEGAN to tell you about our garden, but got swept off, apropos of our fine crop of dandelions, into a dissertation on dandelion wine and other local vintages. Well, we have been so bothered by home-made wine-experts wanting to come into our messuages to pick it over for the cellar that we have had to take up gardening in self-defence.

Neither Frances nor I knew anything about gardens, but Mr. Lowpark of the village shop, who has never yet failed to fall in with any demand, sold us garden implements, weed-killer, fertilizer, vegetable seeds, vegetable saucepans (for later on), four bundles of pea-sticks, and some netting to put over fruit-bushes. He also sold us tooth-paste by way of relaxation, and before we could draw breath informed us that 'my boy Joe' was a fine gardener and would be over that evening to start work.

'My boy Joe' came and dug, and within the week all the dandelions had gone, leaving just the good, rich Sussex soil—and unfortunately other dandelions, presumably young ones, who either had got scared at first sight of 'my boy Joe' and his spade and had hidden till the

trouble was over, or else who simply hadn't heard about our decision to have a garden. Since by that time our 'gardener' was leisurely rebuilding a collapsed gatepost for us—Mr. Lowpark having assured me that 'my boy Joe' was a fine bricklayer—we set about weeding the garden ourselves.

That was a month ago. We still don't know anything about gardens, but we do now know a lot about weeds. In fact, we are contemplating a little treatise, which should fill an undoubted want. For weeds are one of the most important things about gardens, and yet every single book on gardening that we have looked at merely dismisses them with a few words such as, 'Weeds should now be hoed up', or 'Hand-weed between the rows during the spring', or 'Apply weed-killer to paths and drives', or some such guff.

These statements are all absurd. Firstly, most weeds can't be hoed up, unless you propose to combine the hoeing with some more useful thing, such as excavating for the foundations of a new house. Secondly, the best time for weeding is not the spring but from early January to late December, which allows (perhaps unwisely) for a short Christmas holiday. Thirdly, the worst of weed-killer, except as a means of getting rid of one's superfluous wives,

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is that most weeds thrive on it, and anyway prefer to grow in and around young plants which don't. Which I think disposes of the gardening books.

Now, weeds are of three kinds—I quote of course from our impending treatise. There is the 'groundsel' and 'charlock' type of weed which is easy to pull up, but which grows to an incredible height, bursts into brilliant flower and seeds itself over a couple of acres, all in about a day and a half. Next, there is the 'nettle' type, which, apart from immediately inducing an inferiority complex in you on account of its sting, is practically impossible to pull up because its roots run for miles underground. In pursuit of a nettle-root you may quite easily pull up the whole surface of your garden, and then find that the darn thing disappears under the cottage itself, and that the subsequent architect's report will state that it is unwise to remove it without extensive underpinning. Thirdly, there is the 'dandelion' type, in which class is included the thistle. The two should not be confused, and we gardeners have the following little way of telling them apart. Grasp a leaf firmly in the right hand and attempt to pull. If the leaf comes off it is a dandelion; if you let go first it is a thistle.

Weeds of this last—and I think worst—type

are divided, like all Gaul, into three parts. There is the green part which sticks up above the ground and is useful as indicating the fact that you have a weed; there is the root which you can by infinite labour and patience excavate down to about two feet in depth to the detriment of anything within a yard radius; and thirdly, there is the remaining portion of root below two feet, which you invariably leave in the ground and which grows up again in a week—or in the case of the dandelion within four days.

Of all weeds the dandelion is perhaps the king. Not only does it flower profusely and violently seed itself over your property from next door, but even when you have excavated ninety-nine per cent of it any overlooked fragment of root big enough to have two ends will be sending up new shoots before you've washed your hands. Adam after the Fall was condemned to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and if one of the punishments was expulsion from the Garden into a region where dandelions were growing I'll say he *did* earn it.

After about three or four feet in depth the dandelion's root forks into two to make it more difficult. The dandelion is called *wurri-wurri* in Australia. This is probably the other end of our dandelion.

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Another point about weeds that we shall make in our treatise is that the average gardener invariably treats them wrongly. To discourage a weed and prevent it from growing I recommend the following procedure:

Sow the weed in March or April in weed-boxes and water daily. When about an inch high prick out into rows a foot apart in specially prepared weed-beds of good leaf-mould or well-manured ground. Later set out in the flower-beds and borders and tend carefully. The weeds will at once die, or at worst will only linger for a month.

This is from my personal experience of gardening. On the other hand, to make flowers grow you should hoe them up daily, pull up any that are left, dig up the roots and cut into small pieces, and sprinkle the chasm liberally with weed-killer. Your flower garden will then be a delight to the eye.

Of course it may be that we are peculiar people to whom these things happen. . . . After all, it is surely not everybody who can plant two rows of sweet-peas complete with pea-sticks in April and by the end of June have only four sweet-pea plants even above the ground, while every single pea-stick is in full leaf and flourishing.

XVIII. APPLE SAVES THE BACON

ONE day last summer Author Apple the industrious, the studious, the man of brain rather than of action, was sitting properly-at-ease in his cottage garden writing Great Thoughts, when he was suddenly invaded by pig. Very suddenly. One minute there were just Apple and the calm peaceful world. The next moment this world was chock-full of pig. There was pig on the lawn, pig on the flower-beds, pig trying to fall down the well, pig trying not to fall down the well, and excessive pig in the potato-patch. It was a quarter-grown pig too, of just that mischievous and active age when old Mother Pig is thanking heaven they'll all be packed off to school shortly, and probably this made the invasion seem twice as strong on the wing as it really was. Apple's first estimate put it at two hundred and seventeen head—roughly; actually, by the time the panic caused by his abrupt arising from his deck-chair had died down, there were found to be but eight. Or nine, if you count the little spotted one with the very snub nose that looked as if he had tried to torpedo a tank.

Now, man of peace though Apple is, he is not one to lie down under the threat of pig in his penstemons. He advanced upon them in his wrath, calling at the same time to his head gardener (Tuesdays and Fridays, if fine) to initiate an out-flanking movement. The pigs, Apple knew, belonged to the Home Farm of the Big House opposite and came from a field fifty yards down the road, where some twenty of them had for the last four days been temporarily confined in a wire-netting enclosure (obviously none too pig-proof) until such time as their winter houses (Mon Repos, The Gammons, Sans Sauci, Trotter Lodge, and so on) should have been redecorated internally with all mod. con.

Some masterly manœuvres by the head gardener at last got the mass of pig somewhere near, and, pointing towards the garden gate, at which point Apple said, 'Hoo!' and made an intimidatory rush. A stampede for the exit ensued, in which 'Spots', the snub-nosed piglet, got knocked down and trampled upon by three big pigs in succession. Rising at the count of nine, he made a second panicky rush with the late-comers, was elbowed two points off his course by another big pig, and in consequence rammed the gatepost with such force as no doubt to make him pretty thankful he was a

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very snub-nosed pig already. By this time Apple could clearly see that 'Spots' was the butt of the party, the half-witted pig to whom things happened, the pig who had been dropped by his mother when young and was not quite like other pigs. He was confirmed in this diagnosis a moment later when on getting them all nine into the road 'Spots' again got jostled by another big pig and fell into a ditch full of water.

So far, Apple thought, so good. His garden at least was free of pig, and pausing but to tell his head gardener to raise the cry at the Home Farm that the pigs were over the border, Apple set off in the wake of the strayed sounder.

With the aid of two efficient hedges and much 'Hoo!' Apple manœuvred them along the road as far as the gate into their field. But an ill-considered attempt to go ahead and open it for them merely resulted in their breaking back, and he had to repeat the whole manœuvre. This time he was more cunning. He got them at last all lined up facing their gate and suddenly emitted an extra powerful 'Hoo-oi!'

In line abreast those pigs charged terrified at the gate. Shoulder to shoulder as one pig they plunged for the narrow space under it. And shoulder to shoulder as one pig they stuck.

In the first five seconds, of course, 'Spots' had got badly jammed between two big pigs and was squeezed out again backwards. Here, wailing bitterly he ran up and down the line of his eight companions' ends like a harassed builder looking for a vacant lot in a row of suburban houses.

Again Apple yelled 'Hoo-oi'. 'Spots' nearly had hysterics, but shoulder to shoulder as one pig the others heaved mightily. There was a crack, they lifted the old gate-posts out of their rotted sockets, and charged on once more as it fell behind them. It fell of course on 'Spots'.

Apple mopped his forehead and propped up the gate to keep them in the field; and, with the idea of next getting them into their enclosure, opened a door in the wire-netting. In this he reckoned without the remaining eleven less enterprising, but jealous, pigs left behind. In five seconds there were thirteen pigs out in the field instead of nine, and Apple, fighting like a tube-conductor in the busy hours, could barely stem the rush and force the door shut.

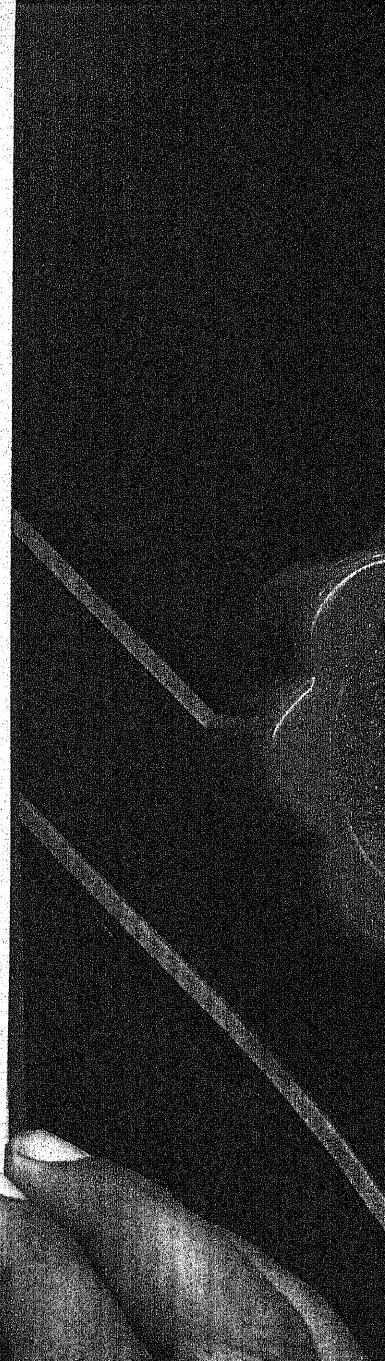
Not since the war can Apple remember having such a busy quarter of an hour as then followed. If he 'Hoo-ed' at the pigs inside to scare them away from the door, he sent the pigs outside panicking all over the field. If

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he 'Hoo-ed' the ones outside up to the door he either couldn't get near it himself to open it, or if he did he frightened some of them into the wire-netting, some into the ditch, and 'Spots' into fits. And if he opened the door swiftly and then by superhuman rushing and 'Hoo-ing' tried to drive them in *en bloc*, there was at once a terrific *mélée* on the threshold, of which the final result was more pigs outside than in, and 'Spots' left for dead in the gateway. Moreover, as time wore on the pigs got used to Apple's 'Hoo'. He had soon to shout 'Skat!' and 'Gup!' and other more difficult noises, and towards the end he was reduced to brute force and the sole of his boot. In this he couldn't help noticing how often it was that 'Spots' was shoved in the line of fire by big pigs. Apple considered 'Spots' got about three to every other pig's one.

At last, when Apple reckoned that every pig of the score had been in and out four times, and there were still seven outside, he had a brain-wave. He opened the door and let them all out. . . . Picking himself up after the rush had passed over him, he set the door open wide, rounded up the whole herd and, 'Hoo-ing', 'Gup-ing', and 'Skat-ing' mightily, drove them in one thick mass at the entrance.

There was a crowded minute, but at last



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Apple was able to slam the door on the last one. Literally on the last one; for it was of course 'Spots'. Apple freed his end, locked the door, and sank into a dead faint of exhaustion, from which he was roused by overseers, farm-hands, foremen, cowmen, pig-men, and what not, all coming up at the double to get the pigs in.

It apparently being considered by the experts that at least half a dozen men were necessary to get nine pigs back, Apple was quite unable to convince them that he had done it unaided, or even that they had been out at all; and they now consider him the worst sort of practical joker. Apple is to-day feeling a little hurt about it all. For, though no farmer, Apple has ascertained that the price of pig is about twenty shillings a score—which means he has actually saved the Big House opposite about nine bob.

XIX. THE GREAT SKI-ING RACE

OF all recreations Apple likes*ski-ing best. Not because it is a change from his normal avocation of authorship—indeed, as far as Apple is concerned, they are both sedentary pursuits—but because he once actually won a Title and a CUP.

The Cup was of quite good china with roses on the outside and the handle missing; the accompanying title was that of World's Worst Skier. Would you like to hear about it? Right, don't put the book down, and you shall! Gather round then, folks, and let Apple tell you of the famous ski-ing race held to decide who was the Worst Skier in St. Moritz—and thus in the whole World; for it is at St. Moritz, as you doubtless know, that even the blind ski.

The race, Apple blushes to say, was only between his old friend Percival and himself. For though half St. Moritz held that Percival, with a ski-ing style like that of a wet hen on the lid of a cardboard box, couldn't help being beaten even by Apple, and the other half—those *who had definitely *seen* Apple ski-ing—maintained stoutly that Percival must be

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the better, there was a regrettable unanimity of opinion as to the superiority of any third person whatever, from the Hotel Infant, who is still half-way through her first lesson, to old Colonel Pluckstie who skis with crutches.

One famous afternoon, therefore, Percival and Apple glared at one another across ten yards of deep snow at the top of a high hill, while their seconds busily lashed skis to their feet and hung them round with satchels and goggles and sandwiches to fall back on,¹ and kegs of brandy and other impedimenta of the long-distance skier.

Actually there had been two previous attempts to run off this race, but they had not quite come to anything because on the first occasion, being so excited and what not, Apple stupidly forgot to put his skis in the funicular which brought him up. No one had any to lend him; and it is difficult to ski well without skis—though personally Apple finds it almost as difficult to ski well with them. And on this second occasion, just as the start was about to be made, Percival cleared his throat rather forcibly and the recoil unexpectedly sent him off backwards into a snow-drift some hundred feet down the other side of the hill, from which he wasn't excavated till it had got, as Percival

¹ Which they later did—several times.

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put it after resorting to his emergency brandy keg, 'too dark to shee'.

On this occasion, however, the pair's supporters, determined that the race was to be run whatever happened, had with great fore-thought tied Apple and Percival to either end of a rope, which was then passed round a tree. Under no circumstances were they to be undone till they had been properly numbered from the right, proved, and otherwise reported perfectly ready for action in every direction.

Despite this, the start was not as successful as it might have been; for, both having been towed to the extreme edge of the hill ready to be cast off, it unexpectedly became apparent that Percival was far heavier than Apple. Or maybe he was merely wearing a bigger brandy keg, or at any rate carrying brandy of a higher specific gravity. But the result was that before any one could do anything about it, Percival began to slide forward down the hill. And, the rope running easily round the smooth tree-trunk, Apple began to move at an equal rate backwards.

Gravity being a swift worker, Percival gathered speed. So, naturally, and in his own direction, did Apple; till soon he flashed round the tree at a good fifteen m.p.h., and, still

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going astern and making signals of distress, proceeded helplessly after Percival with the tow-rope taut between.

Once again the race would have been a total loss, had not the starter, gazing intently at his watch, been standing near Apple's line of motion. With some skill Apple put out a ski-ing stick for him to catch; and with some presence of mind (or it is possible he just wasn't noticing) he caught it, using the crook of his left knee. Thus Apple brought himself to anchor. Incidentally he brought Percival, by then in mid-flight, to a sudden sitting stop and the starter to a sudden flying sit. . . .

As dear old Apple tried to point out to the starter subsequently, there was little real harm done. His remarks melted the snow out of his mouth almost immediately, and it would no doubt be perfectly easy to recover his watch in the spring when the snow went. And as for Percival, he evidently attributed his fall to natural causes; for he soon struggled up, and though held stationary by the rope, attempted vainly to ski onward, much puzzled by the fact that he was nominally in motion but actually making no headway.

When every one had finished laughing (except the starter, who had never really begun) Percival was hauled up backwards—which

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bewildered him even more—till he arrived panting on the hill-top again and matters were explained to him. When he had really grasped it, both were lined up once more and every one shook hands all round. Then the starter fired an unexpected blank cartridge and said: ‘Start!’ and Apple for one started so violently at the report that he fell over.

By the time he had collected himself by sections and gazed round on the illimitable expanse of snow, Percival was but a speck on its whiteness. By this Apple doesn’t so much mean that he had skied far. He had merely skied deep. The speck was all that was visible of him above mean snow level.

This gave Apple hope. Vigorously he struggled to his feet. Hardly was he up before he was moving swiftly onward. As a matter of fact, he usually does this; it is darn difficult not to, when one is getting up on a slope. Then he sped on rapidly down the hillside, and soon found he was aiming straight at Percival, who in blissful ignorance was creeping out of his self-dug crater like some strange animal coming out of a hibernatory sleep.

With masterly skill Apple sought to avoid him. And that was just where he made his mistake. He should have sought to hit him, and all would have been well. . . .

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Poor Apple left the ground for some considerable period and distance, and when he hit it again he established what must have been a world's record for depth ski-ing. Percival merely went abruptly and involuntarily back again into hibernation, under the impression no doubt that it was an avalanche or a re-crudescence of severe winter. Even so—Apple says it with modest pride—it took the pair less time to get up again than it did their followers, who, suddenly discovering they could not ski and laugh properly at the same time, took the line of least resistance and sat down in their tracks for the laugh. After this Percival and Apple skied doggedly onward. Being for the moment on a patch of level ground, they achieved a quarter of a mile without mishap.

Soon they came to the end of the level stretch and started gadarening down a steep place. Neither Percival nor Apple being good at steering and their trails happening at the beginning of the slope to be at a slight angle, they soon found they were diverging. Half-way down they had diverged quite a lot; and Percival being three hundred yards away and on Apple's starboard quarter, they waved each other a helpless farewell. Two-thirds way down Percival was almost out of range and heading for a different canton altogether.

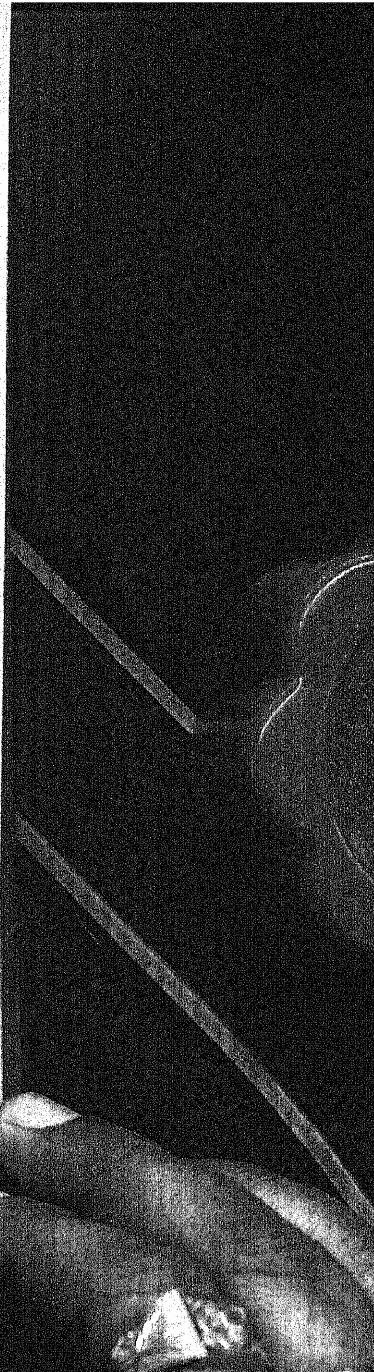
THE GREAT SKI-ING RACE

Eventually he passed hull down behind an intervening fir-clump. Apple, on the other hand, passed hull up into an interposing snow-drift.

Apple remained there for some while. He thought he would rest a bit. The point of his right ski was supporting his left ear, the heel of his left ski was laid across the back of his neck. One ski-ing stick, together with an arm—either the left or right, he could not be certain which—was doubled underneath him. Another arm was flung carelessly in the small of his back . . . well, in short, Apple thought he would rest a bit. The other ski-ing stick had stuck itself into the snow-drift above his body, where it looked, to his approaching supporters, so much like a cross that they all reverently removed their hats as they came up.

After a while, detecting signs of life, they dug the poor old piece out and told him that others of their party were trailing Percival, who had decided (as they humorously put it) to take a shorter but more difficult route to the winning-post.

Apple skied on without incident after this. Eventually he saw Percival converging upon him in the distance, and some minutes later the pair met. They met pretty thoroughly. . . . Ultimately they discovered, as they lay



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prone, that they were on the top of a long steep slope at the bottom of which was the winning-post. The realization spurred them to instant effort, and they began to get up. . . .

Ten minutes later they were still getting up. Apple was half-way up; Percival was right up, but his left ski had come off. As a results his right leg was bent almost up to his chest, and the 'other was two feet deep and still sinking. A moment later Apple laughed triumphantly and set off.

Half-way down, he sat unexpectedly on the back part of his skis and went faster than he had ever gone before. Three-quarters way down he was doing about forty m.p.h., and the group about the winning-post was scattering to safety.

Ten yards from the tape something like a torpedo flashed past Apple, crossed the line, and disappeared with a whizz into Greater Switzerland. It was not Percival, who was still snowbound by the left leg at the top of the hill, but it was Percival's left ski.

Unfortunately, as the judge, anticipating a close finish between two so indistinguishably bad skiers, had ruled that the 'first ski across' won, Percival had officially to be declared the victor. And that, folks, is how Apple won his title of the World's Worst Skier.

XX. GIFT PIPE

FOR over a week now Apple has been contemplating a certain Very Large Pipe which he had given him on his birthday. For over a week he has been saying: 'Well, I think I'll start breaking that pipe in to-morrow.' And now he is beginning to discover within himself a certain doubt as to whether it is the sort of pipe which can be broken in at all. It lies massively before him as he writes this, and, looking at it dispassionately, there seems to be an even chance that he will be the one to be broken in. Possibly the pipe as it sits there in all its polished immensity is saying to itself: 'Well, I think I'll start breaking old Apple in to-morrow.' Possibly too the pipe is right; for Apple believes he is becoming slowly fascinated by the thing. . . . He really *must* start breaking it in to-morrow, if he wants to keep his self-respect. . . .

Apple admits it is by no means an ordinary pipe—certainly not the kind he would ever have had the strength—moral or physical—to buy for himself. For it is the largest, heaviest, most obese pipe he has ever come across. Though in shape it is the ordinary curved

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briar of commerce, as smoked by small men with drooping moustaches in third-class carriages, it is conceived and built on titanic lines. It has a stomach on it like a mandarin; indeed, it can hardly be held in the hand, for it is all of seven and a half inches round on the equator line. And this is no exaggeration: Apple has already devoted a reverent morning to a statistical survey. For instance, it weighs exactly five and a quarter ounces stripped; no fat either; all good bone and *bruyère*. The inside of the bowl is over three inches deep—quite a nasty drop, when you look down it. The outside surface—of which there must be getting on for twenty square inches—is not exactly ‘straight-grain’, nor yet ‘birdseye’, but it has quite a bit of both. There is a fine patch of ‘straight grain’—about three square inches or so—on the eastern façade, and an even larger area of ‘birdseye’ round the corner on the north transept. The rest appears to be just any old grain, but with a good finish—which reminds Apple that he will probably have to arrange about getting a man in weekly to polish it.

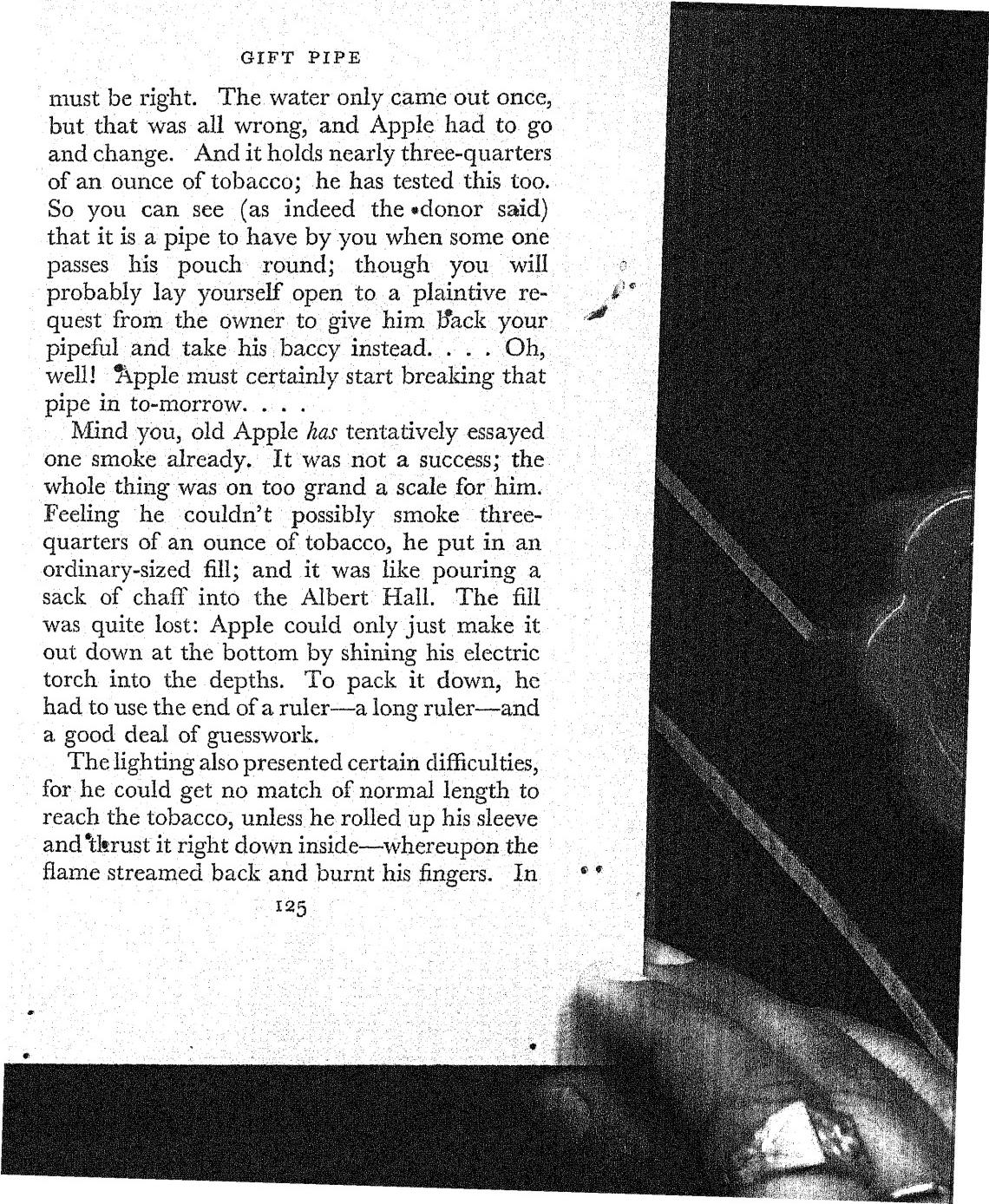
Its internal capacity is two and a half cubic inches; Apple worked it out by filling it with water and doing a sum in arithmetic. The sum came out the same twice running, so it

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must be right. The water only came out once, but that was all wrong, and Apple had to go and change. And it holds nearly three-quarters of an ounce of tobacco; he has tested this too. So you can see (as indeed the donor said) that it is a pipe to have by you when some one passes his pouch round; though you will probably lay yourself open to a plaintive request from the owner to give him back your pipeful and take his baccy instead. . . . Oh, well! Apple must certainly start breaking that pipe in to-morrow. . . .

Mind you, old Apple *has* tentatively essayed one smoke already. It was not a success; the whole thing was on too grand a scale for him. Feeling he couldn't possibly smoke three-quarters of an ounce of tobacco, he put in an ordinary-sized fill; and it was like pouring a sack of chaff into the Albert Hall. The fill was quite lost: Apple could only just make it out down at the bottom by shining his electric torch into the depths. To pack it down, he had to use the end of a ruler—a long ruler—and a good deal of guesswork.

The lighting also presented certain difficulties, for he could get no match of normal length to reach the tobacco, unless he rolled up his sleeve and thrust it right down inside—whereupon the flame streamed back and burnt his fingers. In



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this way he had soon dropped several charred matches down on top of the tobacco, and one unlighted one, the presence of which down there made poor old Apple quite nervous, till he managed to touch it off with a long paper-spill, and breathed again.

By the end of a quarter of an hour there was quite a collection of rubbish down inside the pipe, matches, pieces of half-burnt paper, a safety-pin, two cigarette-ends, and either an odd or an end of string. Staring down at all this was like looking down a disused well-shaft. Apple next tried dropping lighted matches in, to see if he could start up a conflagration that way, but the air probably wasn't very good down there by then, as they all went out on reaching the bottom. He couldn't see that he was much farther on towards his smoke, and he was developing lung trouble from his constant attempts to maintain the necessary forced draught through those cavernous corridors. Moreover, the very weight of the thing was giving him a pain in the collar-bone. So Apple knocked off for a rest.

After an interval he did get the machine going, not quite in the orthodox way, but by then he was determined to kindle it somehow if only to keep the chill out of the straight grain. He filled it as one would lay a fire,

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with sticks and paper, added a touch of paraffin to ensure its burning up well, and then got at it with a pair of bellows. Having thus successfully started it up by hand from cold, he tried to take over himself, but somehow it wasn't quite the same thing. Possibly the paraffin hadn't improved it. Unfortunately too, just when Apple was trying to see whether he could hold it in his mouth without the weight pulling his teeth out, the bowl dropped off the mouthpiece and fell on his foot, laming him severely for some days. So he retired to a sofa and had a cigarette. Frankly, Apple felt he needed a smoke after all his trouble.

Now that Apple is about again, however, he really is going to start breaking that pipe in.
... Say to-morrow. . . .

XXI. FIRE FOR THE GENERAL

GENERALS, I fear, are not what they were. I mean, in the old days when a rare and valuable officer like a General decided to inspect our barracks we could usually ascertain beforehand whether he was the kind who wanted to find everything just right, or who wanted to find something just wrong, or wanted to see soldiers at work, or at play, or not to see soldiers at all; and we could lay our plans accordingly. But nowadays we never know what they're going to do next. They're modern. They have inhibitions, complexes, and repressions. Most difficult people.

We were inspected the other day by General Sir Spurde Feele-Boote. He, we at once found, possessed a fire-complex of such virulence that he should have been under treatment by a pyro-psycho-analyst. He buzzed round and round the barrack fire-station like a fan round a film-star, and patted lengths of hose and insisted on having 'C' Block's hydrant tested (total bag a quart of rusty water, three dead newts, and what looked like one of Private Barrel's socks) and talked about fire precautions, till by the time we got to the

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Headquarter Offices we were all on the jump if any one struck a match fifty yards away.

The Headquarter Offices is a big block full of offices, officers, office-clerks, orderlylies, and enough military documents and files to organize a paper-chase from Havershot to John o' Groats—which wouldn't have been a bad thing to do with them either. Here the General went into the matter of Fire Orders. He looked all round the Adjutant's office and said suddenly, 'What would you do if you had a fire here now?'

'Try to put it out, sir,' replied the Adjutant briskly.

Well, for a moment it looked like being a pretty close thing for the Adjutant. Luckily he was able to explain that all instructions about fires began with that exhortation—ever since our Private Butt, who is not so bright, once spent a precious ten minutes trying to get through to the barrack fire-brigade on a defective telephone, while what had begun as a small smoulder developed into a big bright blaze.

'In the event of fire in this building,' began the General again slowly, with the air of one using two-syllable words to a backward child, 'in what manner do you warn others?'

The Adjutant cast a helpless glance round to

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see if he could see any Fire Orders anywhere; then pulled himself together and showed a flash of those qualities that had enabled him to remain for two years as Adjutant to a human detonation like Colonel Howitzer.

'I instantly tell the Orderly Officer to deal with the situation, sir, while—he coughed modestly—'I save the confidential files.'

At this point Lieutenant Holster began to sidle out of the door. Lieutenant Holster was Orderly Officer. He too soon gave us reason to be proud of what the manual calls the resource and initiative of junior officers; for, caught by the Adjutant and questioned by the General, he explained that the Orderly Officer at once informed the R.S.M. (who at the moment was just outside the door) to take the necessary steps.

'What steps?' asked the General.

Holster choked back the obvious answer, 'Pretty quick ones,' and said, 'Steps to warn those in the building to get out, sir.'

'Well, man, exactly what steps are those?' pursued the General, who had it been a round game and he not a General would have been considered to be losing all along the line. 'No, don't tell me. Just have them taken now.'

With a sigh of relief Holster summoned the R.S.M., who entered, saluted like a whole

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march past, and, as good R.S.M.s will, practically took charge of the proceedings.

'The alarm, sir,' he said benignly, 'is given by blowing a whistle, kept handy in the office.' He half closed his eyes and adopted a recitative tone. '*On - hearing - repeated - loud - shrill blasts - on - a - whistle - indicative - of - the discovery - of - fire, - all - troops - within earshot . . .*'

When I tell you at this point the General interjected: 'Where is the whistle?' you'll see what we were up against.

The R.S.M., however, is a great man. With the air of one humouring a child, he unhooked a large whistle from a nail on the adjacent wall, saluted, and handed it to Holster, who saluted and handed it to the Adjutant, who, to tell the truth, had often wondered what the hell it was there for anyway. He displayed it to the General, and that, we thought, should have settled the matter.

Unfortunately it didn't. As I said, you never know where you are with the modern General. He reached across, took it, and blew into it.

Nothing happened. Not even to the whistle. He blew again. Still nothing—except a slight reddening of the imperial face. The whistle seemed to be merely a blank—possibly for ceremonial purposes. The Adjutant next had

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a go and then passed it to Holster. Holster, however, with the simple faith of a young subaltern in an experienced warrant-officer, simply handed it to the R.S.M.

The R.S.M. frowned and blew sharply into it. It gave an eerie sort of death-rattle, which was certainly an advance on its previous form, but as a warning signal just a mess. Any one within earshot would have been more frightened of the whistle than of the fire.

A R.S.M. is of course unconquerable. He took it from his mouth, gave it a fierce look before which even sergeants have quailed, and put it back. This time he didn't just blow: he BLEW.

The death-rattle broke to a gurgle, what appeared to be a plug of army blanket shot out of the whistle and cracked a picture on the wall, while a blast like the Penzance express passing a wayside station lifted our caps from our heads and burst open the windows. The Adjutant grabbed at the papers on his desk; Holster nearly burst into tears. The General said something in Hindustani. The R.S.M. shook the whistle, wiped it with a khaki silk handkerchief, and returned it modestly to the General.

'It seems all right now, sir,' he said simply. The whistle may have been all right; nothing

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else was. For where the General had expected a rush of feet, loud bugle-calls, and all the well-organized *va et vient* of a false fire-alarm, nothing but a deathly silence still pervaded the office block, broken at last by Private O'Jector's voice from the orderlies' room next door remarking to Private Pullthrough, 'And f'what the hell was that?'

The Adjutant took the whistle and blew a commanding series of what the R.S.M. would have called 'repeated-loud-shrill-blasts'. A few repeated loud blasts answered him from the orderlies' room, coupled with a malediction on 'them —— kids playing in the road outside'.

The R.S.M., about to sally forth and uphold the honour of the regiment, was restrained by the General, who in ominous tones asked, 'And if the whistle is unheeded what further steps are taken?'

The Adjutant, by now beginning to recollect the gist of the orders he had drafted some two years before, said, 'One calls "Fire!" sir.'

'Fire!' called the General, determined to get to the bottom of this. He repeated it; then he went to the door and again shouted 'Fire!' very loudly several times, just as if he were repelling a hostile attack in the trenches. Nothing happened. We felt miserably that perhaps he

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ought to have waited till he could see the whites of their eyes.

We did not think the situation could possibly have become worse, but it did.

From the Orderlies' room next door appeared suddenly Private Pullthrough. In one hand he held a folded newspaper and a bundle of kindling, in the other a coal-scuttle.

'Just coming, sir,' he said affably. 'I'll have it relaid and going in a minute.'

True, it had been a chilly spring day, but after that it got very hot. If the General keeps a black list of battalions in his command we must now be so high up as to be somewhere on the preceding page.

XXII. BALBUS THE BAT

BALBUS was just an ordinary bat. A bat, in case you don't know, is one of those things that whizz silently up and down the lower air at incredible speeds while you are strolling in the mess garden in the evening. The only other information I have about bats is that they do not appear to like cigar smoke and that their steering is too wizardly for words.

The bats that use our mess garden do not have names as a general rule, but Balbus distinguished himself from the others by actually coming into the mess on three occasions.

The first time it happened there was a bit of a sensation. We were sitting at dinner indulging in the usual high-souled chit-chat of the Army taking its leisure; I think the question under discussion was: Where should a quartermaster-sergeant be when a battalion is on the line of march? the answer to which, according to the drill-books, is 'on the right of No. 16 section commander', but in practice is of course 'in the next village getting the best billet for himself'. In the middle of all this Balbus just simply appeared.

He winged his silent way in at one window, circled the room once, flicked so suddenly across the mess-waiter's face that the man dropped a toast-rack, and shot out into the night by another window. It was all over almost before we realized anything had happened. Then Captain Bayonet remarked severely to the world at large that that was no sort of way to go on at all, and Lieutenant Holster said he could hardly credit a thing like that. The junior subaltern, who is a natural history expert and spends his field-days lining a hedge and studying beetles, said it was a bat, while the waiter's unexpressed opinion appeared to be that it was a 'hush-hush' aeroplane.

That, so to speak, was Balbus's preliminary reconnaissance. He appeared again the next night and exactly the same thing happened, except that unfortunately the mess-waiter was this time carrying a plate of soup. Captain Bayonet said he could hardly credit a thing like that, and Lieutenant Holster said it was no sort of way to go on at all. After which considered opinion there was a silence, broken only by the rather too audible voice of the waiter in the adjacent kitchen telling the cook that a 'plurry weasel on wings had blown in his blinkin' face'.

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Next evening was the night of the big battle. Previously we had been restrained from reprisals by the colonel's presence, but this night he was dining out and we had determined to take a strong line over things flying about in our mess-room. Balbus in short, if he arrived, was to be driven out at once.

Balbus did not appear till after the port had been round twice. We had almost forgotten about him when he suddenly came in at the window and the cautious mess-waiter, who this time was carrying a full decanter, left hurriedly by the door. Balbus flew round and round the mess-room at unbelievable speed, a bare inch or so above the heads of those sitting at table. Each time he flew down the line every one's head ducked in turn—like one of those wooden toys representing chickens feeding out of a trough. Then Captain Bayonet took the matter in hand and, as prearranged, gave the call to arms.

There are, hanging on the wall at the end of the mess, various weapons and insignia which at one time belonged to a platoon of African natives. So we rose from table and seized upon them. Captain Bayonet wore a chief's head-dress and directed operations from a corner. Lieutenant Holster had a rusty two-handled sword, while Lieutenant James secured a bow

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and a quiver of arrows. Stout Captain and Quartermaster Ledger who was dining in that evening, took a tom-tom—pronounced *tum-tum*, as we all rudely pointed out to him within ten seconds. The junior subaltern got a Dyak blow-pipe from somewhere, and I had a dagger. Others had various weapons, ranging from a stick with spikes on the delivery end to a club with large and nobby-looking warts. As soon as we had fallen in, battle was joined.

The difficulty was, we soon found, "to see Balbus at all. He went so fast that he had arrived there almost before he had left here—if you know what I mean. But our *moral* was high. We were resolutely determined to evict him as soon as possible.

The attack opened with a broadsword charge by Lieutenant Holster, our archery squad—Lieutenant James—being in support. The blow-piper was kept in tactical reserve.

To the inspiring notes of the 'Charge' by Captain Ledger, they advanced gallantly, and Lieutenant Holster clave a chair from helm to chine, while James put an arrow through a portrait of a very distinguished general. Balbus was unharmed, and instantly delivered a surprise air attack upon our left flank, where the subaltern who was wielding the stick "with spikes, in making a Tilden service, hit himself

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behind the ear and had to be taken to the casualty clearing station.

Captain Bayonet then ordered the second wave to go over, and standing on the table I nearly succeeded in pinning Balbus to the ceiling with my dagger. Balbus, however, produced a good Immelmann turn at the critical moment, and the dagger is still there. As we can't get it out, the mess-sergeant is going to use it to hang misltetoe on at Christmas, but that is beside the point.

The conflict raged, with three-quarters of an hour's break for refreshments, for an hour and a half—at the end of which time Balbus appeared to be developing slight engine trouble, but seemed otherwise fit and well. The casualties on our side, however, had been terrific. Arrows were sticking everywhere, and the portrait of the very distinguished general looked rather like a picture of Saint Sebastian. A large amount of crockery had been broken and chairs shattered; and Lieutenant Holster had been severely damaged in the eye by an olive from the junior subaltern's blow-pipe. Incredible as it may seem, we had so far failed to drive Balbus out. He even appeared to be enjoying it.

At 11 p.m. Captain Ledger was badly shot in his pronounced *tum-tum* and put out of

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action. At 11.5 Balbus took refuge in Captain Bayonet's head-dress, and Captain Bayonet only just stopped the subaltern with the nobby-looking club in time.

At 11.6 the colonel walked unexpectedly in. There was a silence.

The colonel just looked at us all. He asked what we were doing. We replied that we were just driving a bat out of the mess, as livestock was not permitted in barracks. We added we had had a little trouble.

The colonel looked at us all again. He can look too.

Then he just looked at Balbus, and without any more fuss Balbus got up and flew straight out of the window.

There was another silence as the colonel stalked out, broken only by Captain Bayonet remarking in an undertone that that was no sort of way to go on at all. Lieutenant Holster was heard to add that he could hardly credit a thing like that.

XXIII. PLEASED TO MEETCHA

ONE of the things that worried me most in New York—apart, of course, from drug-store gin—was the question of how to deal with the situation that arose whenever I was introduced to any one. Nothing is more difficult for the average Englishman than to know exactly how to handle an American greeting. For Englishmen at introductions are usually so shy, so suspicious, so strongly silent, while Americans under similar conditions, are self-confident, securely poised, and even appear to enjoy it.

An English introduction, for instance, generally goes like this: The mutual friend says, very often after you have all been chatting happily away together for some minutes, ‘By the *way*, I don’t believe you two know each other.’ He then abruptly disintegrates into a nervous wreck, and blushing shamefacedly mumbles, ‘Mr. Smerr, m’y-I-yintr’duce Mr. Brmmmm . . . ?’ And that just about heaves a spanner into the works. You shake hands as if facing up to a ‘Try-Your-Grip’ machine, glowering at one another the while, and it’s ten to one the happy chat dies on its feet right

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there. At other times the introduction devolves into a scene of such unparalleled formality that, whatever the willingness, nothing more matey than polite small talk about the huntin' and the shottin' can possibly result between the two of you for at least ten minutes, by which time one or other will have been led up to the jump again somewhere else. But at any rate we are used to it.

In America, on the other hand, as I soon discovered, the ceremony is characterized by a terrific friendliness and lack of affectation, a getting as it were down to the brass tacks of the business. Few Americans, for instance, would dare to pull the 'May I introduce . . . ?' gambit. One of the high-contracting parties would be sure to say 'No' just for the devil of it, and then they'd be sunk. No, there is a simple directness about the whole thing which is almost attractive. So on those rare occasions when any mutual acquaintance has been able to introduce a couple of strangers before they have already become firm friends, it goes something like this. 'Mr. Dwenton Sherford,' says the mediator clearly and solemnly, 'meet Mr. Manchester Lyons.' At once they both grip hands, looking keenly into one another's eyes (possibly with memories of that Character Building Course, Lesson VII—*Impress Your*

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Personality from the First), and Mr. Dwenton Sherford says, 'Vurry pleased to meet you, Mr. Manchester Lyons,' while Mr. Manchester Lyons is saying, 'Vurry pleased to meet you, Mr. Dwenton Sherford.' They then fall at once to asking what the other's racket is, or inquiring about Associated Varnish Common, or exchanging recipes for ageing whisky by hand, and the thing is done. Within a couple of days they are Dwenton and Manchester to one another, within a week Dwen and Man; or if they ultimately become really intimate, they will call each other plain Lyons and Sherford to distinguish the fact.

Now you can see how difficult I found it all, accustomed as I was to our own insular traditions and plunged into a transatlantic *milieu* with the usual English belief in the natives' uncouth customs. To begin with, the introduction invariably came upon me suddenly. I would find myself all at once being propelled by the elbow through the crowd (there always was a crowd—which is about the only thing that made the introduction possible), juggling other people's cocktails as I went, and thus, if they weren't good cocktails, vicariously burning holes in my host's carpet—with the result that, when ultimately I was lined up in front of my opponent, I was in no fit state to do

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anything but blush and stammer. At which point the introducer would practically finish me off by intoning my full name in a loud, clear voice and requesting a Mr. Sheffield D. Gleitsch to meet me. *

Upon hearing the re-echoing syllables of my own name I used at once to break into a gentle perspiration. Said out loud my name always sounded so darn silly. In fact it *was* darn silly. How did I ever come to get a fool of a name like that: Sheffield D. Gleitsch is sheet music beside it. The introducer would then say it all again, louder, but this time requesting me to meet Mr. Sheffield D. Gleitsch. By then, unfortunately, I generally felt I just couldn't. I was in no condition to meet even a John Smith, let alone a Sheffield D. Gleitsch. My feet had swollen and something had come adrift in the pit of my stomach. I only wanted to go and lie down. I perhaps managed to stammer 'Howy' do', and Mr. Gleitsch, probably repeating my name once more, would then grip my hand and say in a firm, collected manner, 'Pleased to meet you.'

Now this remark is calculated to put any Englishman, even in a less precarious state, down for a count of ten. Having failed to think of it yourself, you have nothing to say to it in reply. For there *is* really no proper retort

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to 'Pleased to meet you,' unless you can fire the same off at the same time. Various responses have been tried, ranging from the facetious to the fatuous, and none meets the case. To say, for instance, 'Thank you very much,' instantly puts the affair in a class with a presentation to visiting royalty, and unless you are prepared to sign a few autographs and mumble something about 'hands across the seas' into a microphone, you'd better just get under the big sofa and wait till you're thrown out with the empties. To say 'Yes' is about as bad: you might as well make a job of it and add, as humorously-minded Americans themselves used to do, 'Pleased to have you know me'. The simple word 'Granted' may just get over if you can produce it with a merry laugh, but in your probable condition by then the merry laugh will no doubt emerge as a sort of nervous throaty cackle, which will certainly focus the awed attention of every one in the room and probably bring a couple of doctors to your side bursting with professional interest. 'Oh—er—are you?' has also been said, but the man that said it had apparently by that time already become slightly unhinged, and at any rate was never the same fellow afterward. 'And *'I'm* pleased to meet *you*' is better, but generally comes out so fulsomely that Mr.

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Gleitsch surreptitiously puts his wallet and watch in an inside pocket, buttons up his coat, and refuses to discuss the Stock Market. 'Sez *you*' is snappy, but would not be considered polite in the circles in which it is hoped you are moving. A fairly good line is for you to play up to what many Americans expect of the Englishman and drawl out, 'Jolly fine weathah, not 'alf, what?' haul out a monocle, load up your face with it, remark that you have an appointment to lecture at Carnegie Hall, and beat it while the going's good. Monosyllabic answers like 'Quite!' 'Absolutely!' and even 'Probably!' are completely out of the question.

On the whole, I used to get off best by adopting a small subterfuge. I would merely nod and smile and point to my tongue, intimating that I had been suddenly afflicted with aphasia. The onus of keeping up the conversation then devolved entirely on the American, and lots of them don't mind that. Speech would return to me later; a convincing way, I found, was to let it happen at the impact of the home-brewed whisky. Of course I might subsequently overhear Mr. Gleitsch telling friends that that Englishman was dumb. But that's what I'd probably hear anyway, so why in hell worry?

XXIV. THE PARTY

I HAVE now been to a drinking-party. At least not a real American drinking-party—just an aesthetic little affair in honour of some genuine old liquor presented to an American friend of mine by an uncle with an enduring cellar.

I was in my hotel lounge one morning with a young Englishman I had met on the boat and hadn't been able to stop meeting ever since, when my American friend came up and murmured mysteriously, 'It's my birthday and I've got two bottles of genuine old peach brandy. Will you come around to-night and help drink it?'

Yes, he was a friend of mine; indeed, he was more like a relation after that. I shook his hand.

'O.K. What time?' I said in my best speakeasy whisper, which I do rather well, for the skin has never properly grown again on my epiglottis after my first American Scotch.

'Nine,' he muttered. 'Be on time; there's a bunch of the boys coming. It's the real goods,' he added. 'My uncle got it years ago in Paris

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from the Club des Cents and has had it ever since. It's not even *made* in France now. Over the legitimate strength even there.' He looked round, saw the English stiff sitting by me, and continued before I could stop him, 'Perhaps your friend will come too?'

And he, before I could stop him either, had accepted.

• • • • •
We were right there at nine. I had taken the precaution to warn the Englishman, whom I didn't trust, not to make any break like asking for seltzer with it, or whether it had come straight off the boat. Above all, I had begged him to remember the old country and not let any of the Americans pull his leg. His name was Thwaites, you see, and he looked that sort. However, he promised faithfully that he would not let me down.

Due solemnity marked the occasion. The two bottles of the Old and Un procurable stood in the centre of the table, with a box of cigars and antique liqueur glasses, and the cocktail shaker had been draped in black and hidden in a corner. The only jarring note it seemed to me was the number of persons present. The 'bunch of the boys' consisted of

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at least seven all told, and there were only two bottles. However, four of the lads had been obviously hitting up our host's birthday already, so I hoped their wits were by now a little dull and they wouldn't notice if I sneaked in one or two ahead of schedule.

As the senior representative of an officially moister nation, the honour of opening the first bottle was delegated to me. I was thus able to dispel an unworthy doubt by assuring myself that it *was* genuinely old. Older than that in fact; I think I found something like a fossil trilobite in the sealing-wax round the cork.

Our glasses were filled with an almost colourless liquid. It smelt pungently, but not exactly of peach; maybe it was a very old peach. We wished our host many happy returns and many generous uncles, and many more bottles, and drank. . . .

I don't know what that peach brandy *had* been, but it certainly wasn't any longer. I have drunk the stuff the bell-hop sells you when you are just over from England and don't know any better; I have drunk drug-store gin made up by an absent-minded druggist; and I have drunk something out of a small keg, which subsequently—when my host peered into the bunghole with a lighted match to see if there were any more left—

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exploded and burnt his eyebrows off. But never yet have I had anything to equal that alleged liqueur. It shrivelled one's teeth in their gums; it tasted like a flame gone bad.

Out of the seven of us five simultaneously grabbed off a cigar and the apartment flickered eerily to the frantic flashing of five lighters. The only two who didn't thus snatch at the sole life-saver handy—and I'll tell you we'd even have reached for a sweet instead—were this egg Thwaites and our host. Thwaites was apparently savouring the ghastly fluid with a beatific expression, and our host was still returning thanks for our good wishes and hadn't yet drunk.

He made quite a nice little speech, while we were gratefully drawing smoke into every crevice of our souls and wondering whether we oughtn't to warn him.

At last he drank. A sort of spasm passed across his face and I silently handed him over a cigar. He too lit it in something under a second. Then we could see him figuring it out to himself. First he looked like apologizing; and then he evidently realized that you couldn't serve stuff like that and get away with it by a casual apology; and finally he seemed to give a gulp and decide that as none

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of us had said anything it must be all right, and maybe he'd got out of touch with good liquor.

'Great stuff!' he gasped.

'I'll say so,' replied another, brushing away a tear of sheer pleasure. 'The way I see it you can't get stuff like this nowadays. Not even here—I mean not even in France.'

'Wonderful!' breathed Thwaites, and actually fondled his glass. . . .

That wasn't a very wild party. One craven spirit remembered a date and went without his heel-taps. The rest of us struggled on, thanking Heaven the cigars were strong ones.

And then that poor sap Thwaites said 'Yes' when asked tentatively to have another. I felt deeply for our host, who had to have one too. But when Thwaites raised him to three, the man threw down and said he guessed it was so good his uncle wouldn't like him to drink it all right off the handle. . . .

'Now,' I said sternly, when I later got him alone in Tenth Street, 'how in hell did you get down three glasses of that stuff? It tasted just like petrol to me.'

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The fool stopped and looked at me in surprise. '*Tasted* like petrol! Why, I thought it *was* petrol. But I remembered the old country as you said and wasn't going to have any smart Americans pulling *my* leg.'



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